

Chapter One: The Consequence

Hermione Granger sat on the edge of the bathtub at her parents home clutching a white stick in her hands, staring at it aimlessly. Pregnant? After the fourth test she still didn't believe it. But they were all unanimous. She had been feeling ill every morning for the last two weeks. After worrying about it all day she had finally plucked up the courage to walk down to the muggle chemist and buy several pregnancy kits. Then she sat in the bathroom for at least 50minutes before she worked up the courage to actually take the test.

Four times. Four times it said she was pregnant. The tests did not lie. She had had a feeling that they would be positive, but it did not make her feel any better. Now she sat lost in thought, clutching the now blue stick in her hands, staring at it as though it were going to come to life any second. What would she tell Harry? Ron.. her parents? A feeling of dread welled up inside her as she realized she would have to face the consequences of what she had done.

"For the love of god Hermione, how long does it take to have a whizz?" Anna's voice came as the door to the bathroom burst open.

This wasn't unusual for her older sister to do, but hermione had been in such a state she had forgotten to lock the door.

"Jesus Anna, what the hell are you doing?" Hermione yelled in alarm throwing her hands behind her back, but not quick enough.

"What the hell am i doing? What the hell are you doing?" Anna said in surprise diving for Hermione's arms.

"Nothing. Quit it."

"It doesn't look like nothing, let me see."

"Anna i said quit!" Hermione yelled as her older sister snatched the pregnancy test from her grip.

"Oh my God.." Anna said as the realisation of what this stick represented hit her.

"Anna please.." Hermione began pleading.

"You're Pregnant?"

"Anna please be quiet.. i havn't had the chance to think about this yet.."

"I can't believe you're pregnant.." Anna said quietly.

"It was an accident.." Hermione pleaded.

"Better bloody well have been an accident. What were you thinking?" Anna snapped.

"I.. I wasn't.. Harry was upset.. I was trying to comfort him.. one thing led to another.."

"Wait wait wait... Harry? Harry Potter is the father?" Anna said holding up her hand.

"It was an accident Anna, we didn't mean for it to happen.."

"I thought he was just your friend?" Anna queried.

"He was.. I mean is. He is just my friend."

Anna snorted. "Not now, hes far more than that now."

"Anna please your not helping, i need to think." Hermione said rubbing her head wearily.

"What's there to think about? You have to tell mum and dad. Then you have to tell Harry. My god, i can't believe your pregnant. You," Anna laughed. "I'm the bad one remember, i bet they had money on the fact that id be the one who wound up pregnant from some random guy..."

"..Alright alright, i made a mistake..."

"..You're the goody two shoes girly swat.."

"..Thanks Anna.."

".. You're not supposed to be interested in guys..."

"...Just cause i like books does not make me a lesbian.."

"... Just books..."

"Jesus Anna can you stop now? I screwed up alright, and no one was expecting me to ever screw up i get it. Now can you go away so i can figure this out." Hermione yelled.

Anna fell silent and looked at her younger sister with an apologetic look mingled with sympathy. "It's going to be ok you know." She said quietly.

""I've made a mess of things haven't I?" Hermione said under her breath.

"The best of us do, at some stage or another." Anna said. "I'll come with you when you tell mum and dad." she added as she exited the room to leave her sister alone.

"Thank you.." Hermione called after her departing sister.

Left alone Hermione could finally think over the events that lead up to this life changing moment. She realized that above all else, she was petrified. Scared of what her parents would think of her, scared of what Ron would think of her.. Scared that Harry might be angry, that he might never forgive her. She rocked backwards and forwards with her head in her hands, thoughts numbing her mind as she tried to think of a solution. As she tried to think of a way to change the past.

Hermione knocked loudly on the door three times then stepped back, awaiting the door to be opened. No answer. Knocking again, more aggressively this time Hermione accompanied it by a threat.

"Harry James Potter open the door right now." she said in her usual stern voice.

The other boys who shared Harry's dormitory had gone out to let the boy have some time alone, Neville and Ron were still in the hospital wing of course, and would be for some time. After a few seconds

muffled noises could be heard approaching the door then suddenly the latch clicked and it creaked inward. As the crack widened Hermione saw Harry's already retreating back move towards his bed.

She sighed, collecting herself and marched over to him. "How are you?" she asked carefully.

Harry shrugged, but did not speak, he suddenly became very interested in a piece of loose string on the cover of his bed. Hermione gave a familiar worried look as she sat down next to her best friend.

"Did you speak with Dumbledore?" she asked.

Harry nodded slowly.

"And?"

"And he's been keeping things from me all of my life." Harry said bitterly.

Hermione frowned, obviously this meeting with the headmaster did not go as well as she had hoped. She had hoped he might be able to ease some of Harry's pain over losing Sirius, but instead it seemed that he had only made matters worse.

"Harry.." she said quietly.

"Hermione don't. Don't tell me it wasn't my fault." Harry said.

"But Harry it wasn't. Sirius wouldn't want you to dwell on this, you know it wasn't your fault."

"Sirius is dead Hermione. He was all i had left. The last person i had left who was remotely like a parent. Now what do i have? Nothing.." he said dissolving slowly into silent tears that choked him.

"Thats not true Harry, You have Remus, Dumbledore, all the teachers at this school and all the students. Ron, Neville, Dean, Seamus, Ginny. And you have me, Harry, you'll always have me. Ron and I will always be here for you. My god Mrs Weasley thinks of you as her own son, so does Mr Weasley. Not to mention the Order of the

Phoenix. I'm not saying we can replace Sirius, no one can do that. But we're here for you Harry." Hermione pleaded.

She put her arms around Harry gently, and he lent into her embrace, his head falling onto her shoulder as grief poured out of him. Squeezing her tightly to his body he cried heavily, cried as he had never done before. Hermione hushed him soothingly and ran her fingers up and down his back, trying to relax him, she too felt the overwhelming loss of sirius' presence.

"He was the only one who understood me Hermione. He was like my father. Why does everyone i care about have to die?" he choked angrily.

"Shh Harry. Its ok, I'm here.. No one else is going to die.. Its ok.." She said, pulling his face up so she could look into his eyes.

Smiling she wiped the tears from his face. "Its going to be ok. I know this is unfair, and hard, and a horrible tragedy, but we will get through this Harry. We'll get through this together.."

Harry sniffed then looked up into Hermione's eyes, suddenly moved by their vivid color.

"You've always been here for me Hermione.. you and Ron..I just want to say.. Thank you.. Thank you for standing by me when no one else would.. I owe you everything.."

"You don't owe us anything Harry.. we love you.. and we care about you more than anything in the world. We just want to know that you're ok.."

Harry gave a weak smile, then leaned over and kissed Hermione softly on the cheek near the corner of her mouth. Hermione froze as he pulled away just a couple of inches, put his hand on her cheek and moved in again, his lips brushing over hers gently, then kissing her passionately...

"Things just got out of control." Hermione said, her head in her hands.

She was sitting at the dining room table, next to Anna. Sitting directly opposite her were her mother and father. Two maybe three hours had passed since Anna had confronted her in the bathroom, it had taken her quite some time to compose herself enough to break the news to her parents.

"Out of control? Out of control? Thats an understatement. Ha! Out of control!" her father had reacted in the exact way she had predicted, he was livid.

"Harry was upset, i was upset. we weren't thinking straight, i was trying to comfort him but it just went too far.." Hermione tried rephrasing.

"Oh yeah.. i bet he was upset.. yeah... real upset.." Her father muttered under his breath.

"Dad! Harry isn't like that!" Hermione said in outrage.

"Hermione.. ALL teenage boys are LIKE THAT. I don't care if there wizards, muggles or lephrachauns!" he shouted, turning a vibrant shade of red.

"Now dear.." Her mother began addressing her father.

"Don't you "now dear" me, woman! Our daughter is pregnant, out of wedlock, to a warlock!"

"Wizard, Dad." Hermione corrected him in a bored voice.

"Whatever! Where is this Harry boy? Huh? Does he know? More importantly does he know that I know? I'll rip his heart out with a spoon. I'm a dentist! I know how to inflict pain on the unwary!" her father roared.

"Dad, don't you think your over reacting? I mean, come on.. this means your going to be a grandpa.." Anna said in a tempting voice.

All the color drained from Her fathers face as he sank down into his chair. This statement appeared to have shocked him more than anything. His gray hairs suddenly seemed more prominent.

"I can't believe this.." He said in despair. "My baby girl is pregnant.. I don't believe this.."

"Dad." Hermione said sternly. "Its a baby, not a disease. calm down."

"Don't you tell me to calm down young lady! You've made a very big error of judgment and now you're paying for it! This boy, Harry, i hope he cares about you as much as you say he does, otherwise you're in for a very very lonely nine months of hell, followed by a very long and lonely rest of your life!" he fired up again.

"Jonathan Really!" Hermione's mother scolded.

"Don't you dare defend her actions! Either of you!" he said catching Anna's eye.

"She was worried about her friend. She went to make sure he would be ok, things got out of hand John, these things happen." Hermione's mother said through gritted teeth.

"Well that may be so but these things do not happen to my youngest daughter! Hermione your grounded! Now tell me where this boy lives i'm going to pay him a visit." Her father yelled.

"Like hell dad, I'm not letting you anywhere near Harry when you're like this. This isn't his fault!"

"Oh? Got yourself pregnant did you?" Her father spat.

Hermione fell silent.

"I can't believe this Hermione, you've been very irresponsible." her mother said, sounding more hurt than angry.

"I'm sorry mom.." she began.

"Don't go sucking up to your mother! I've changed my mind. We're all going. You, me and your mother. Anna you stay here. We're going to sit down and discuss the future with this boy. If you're lucky, i wont kill him, but that depends on his attitude." Jonathan said in blind rage.

"No! I won't take you there. Not to ambush him. he deserves the right to be told by me first! Alone." Hermione insisted angrily.

"Fine." her father snapped. "We'll wait in the car while you tell young Harry that you're the mother of his child, then, once he knows, we're coming in to talk. I don't care Hermione," He said silencing her, "His parent's deserve the right to know as well, we can all sit down and talk about this like adults. You've both messed up. Now you have to except the responsibilities of your actions. So hurry up both of you get your coats and meet me in the car."

Hermione made a pleading glance to her mother, who gave her a disapproving glance then looked away as she went to get her coat. Hermione, defeated, went to retrieve her coat, tears stinging her eyes. This was the last thing Harry needed, her dysfunctional family on his doorstep, roaring about the fact that he got her pregnant. More and more she was wishing that she had owled Harry before telling her parents. At least then he would have been prepared for the onslaught. Now he would expect nothing, and most probably be very very alarmed at her fathers erratic behavior.

Taking her coat from the peg in the hallway she slid it on and walked slowly down the hall, only to be halted by Anna.

"Don't worry kid. The old man will come around, he's just in shock. And you know he's too chicken to take on a wizard. He's getting a bit ripe for his old age really. " The older girl said with a grin.

Hermione gave a half hearted snicker then frowned, troubled by her thoughts.

"Hermione. Its going to be ok. Talk to Harry, i know he'll understand. He's as much to blame for this as you are and somehow you're going to have to make this work. You two have been best of friends since you met at Hogwarts, i know you can work through this together." Anna said hugging her younger sister.

Hermione nodded soundlessly.

"Just ignore dad, and make sure Harry does too. We all know he's gone senile." Anna said with another grin.

Hermione couldn't help but grin back, Anna took great pleasure in poking fun at their father, sometimes Hermione thought this was the only thing that gave the older girl true joy.

"Hermione Jane Granger get your ass in the car right now!" Boomed her fathers voice down the corridor.

"I'm coming!" She yelled back in frustration.

Anna grinned. "You know, It will be kinda cool, being Awesome Aunty Anna."

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "Your really thinking too far ahead you know that."

"Yeah, but hey, At least someone in this house is happy for you, right?" Anna said with a wry smile.

"I don't even know if i'm happy for me yet. It all depends on how Harry takes the news. And i'm scared he'll never forgive me." she said quietly.

"Well..." Anna said rubbing her chin. "There's one way to find out.. Get going."

Anna pushed Hermione all the way down the corridor and out the front door. "Remember, you're in this together. Harry will be ok about this, he may be shocked at first, but he'll get used to the idea. Trust me."

"Bye Anna." Hermione said reluctantly as her father yanked her into the car.

As the car pulled out of the driveway Anna waved to Hermione, concern plastered on her face.

Chapter 2: The Significance of Flesh and Blood

Harry Potter lay on his ragged bed at 8pm, not daring to move as every time he flinched searing pain ripped through his body. The sheets beneath him felt slick and in places were torn, crusted and stiff. He had been lying facing the ceiling since the night before to keep the air off of his back which stung with vengeance every time it hit the air. He had been trying determinedly for hours and hours to see the ceiling, to have the image of that familiar ceiling swim back into view, but without success. The last thing he had seen was his uncle's smirking face as he poured the acid into Harry's eyes two nights ago.

He shifted gingerly and regretted it instantly as a burning pain shot through every inch of his body. He moaned in agony clutching at his left leg. It was so severely broken that bone was protruding through the skin at his shin. Although he could not see it, he could feel the bone tearing at his flesh every time he dared move. Biting his lip so hard that fresh blood seeped down his chin, he relaxed his tensed muscles slowly as the pain began to subside. Letting his hand fall to the sticky sheets he gasped for breath painfully. He knew what soaked his bed was his own blood, he had been lying in it for days and it had begun to smell quite vulgar.

With his left hand he reached up to his neck slowly, which was lined with black and yellow bruises from where Vernon had choked him to near death several times just to watch him squirm. Feeling about with his fingers, he carefully pulled upon the fine chain he bore around his neck to find the ring that it held. As his fingers came across the solid silver ring he wrapped them around it protectively, it was the Potter family Ring.

He remembered the day he had come by the ring like it were yesterday. He had just met Hagrid, had just been informed that he was a wizard who possessed magic powers. Hagrid had taken him to Diagon Alley for the first time to collect all his books and school things that he would need for Hogwarts. Harry found most of that first day a hazy blur, he had been so excited, so overwhelmed by the world of magic that lay hidden from Muggles. But when he was first given the Potter family ring, that was a moment he would remember vividly for all of his days...

... "Ah... Mr Potter." The Head Goblin said eyeing him carefully with mingled respect and curiosity. "We have been awaiting your arrival for many long years. It is a pleasure to finally meet you sir. Welcome to Gringotts."

"Um.." Harry began casting a confused glance to Hagrid who looked about shiftily. "Thank you. Its a pleasure to meet you too." He finished eventually.

The goblin glanced at Hagrid, then nodded satisfactorily. "As you know, your parents requested that you be left their fortune if ever they were to.. pass on unexpectedly." The Goblin continued. "I am Griphook, manager of the Potter family fortune and your parents personal banker. I have a few personal items that i was instructed to hand over as soon as you arrived."

"Personal Items?" Hagrid asked.

"Yes, yes.. nothing extravagant. Come, follow me,It is best if we continue this in my office." Griphook said offhandly, beckoning them to follow him down a dark corridor.

"What personal items Hagrid?" Harry asked through the corner of his mouth as they followed the limping Goblin, "I thought we were just coming to collect some money so i could buy my school things?"

"I don't know Harry, i wasn't expecting this. It wasn't as if Lily and James knew they were going to ..well.. you know. We'll just have to wait and see. I imagine this won't take long. He'll probably take us to the vault afterwards."

"Come come," Griphook said impatiently, giving them a hurry up as the flaming torch he bore in his hand bobbed up and down. "This way!"

The goblin turned abruptly into a smaller, narrower corridor that lead to a single heavy wooden door with a large brass knocker on it. Heaving the door open he beckoned them in hastily and closed the door behind them, the wood grating against the cold stone floors loudly and echoing all the way down the hallways.

"Take a seat, Mr. Potter. And you." He motioned to Hagrid as he bustled around behind a large wooden desk.

The room was large and very empty, sparsely decorated with a medium sized bookshelf overflowing with old books and his desk. No natural light entered the room, instead it was lit with dozens of torches slung in brass brackets on the stone walls, casting a dull orange glow around the room. Harry noticed two seats on his side of the desk and sat down cautiously, fearing the rickety furniture might snap beneath him even though he was of minuscule weight. He cast Hagrid a glance, who had funnily enough decided to remain standing.

Griphook frowned at the towering figure but seemed to admit defeat and proceeded to pull a large silver box out from a locked desk draw. Harry noticed an elaborately engraved P on the lid of the box and immediately snapped to attention. The thought that this box had once been held and owned by his parents gave him an indescribable feeling, one that jolted right to his stomach. On closer inspection he also noted that a large Stag had been engraved rearing up to the P, and was lost on its meaning.

Griphook smiled noticing the boys face and gently opened the lid to reveal a royal blue velvet lining inside the silver box.

"This, Mr Potter, belonged to your late father," he said carefully turning the box around so that the boy may examine the contents on his own. "Everything that is within has been left to you according to their will."

Harry glanced at Hagrid with an eager look. He could not describe his feelings, excitement, sadness, joy. He had never even seen a picture of his parents, and had nothing of theirs to remember them by, and suddenly, after 11 years, here in front of him lay a box filled with items that they had wished him to have. He dared not believe it to be true until Hagrid smiled and nodded at him, giving him permission to look through the belongings.

"Take your time, Mr Potter." Griphook said with a grin. Harry had almost forgotten in his mixed emotions how peculiar it was to be sitting in a room opposite a goblin who was the manager of the Wizarding Bank, Gringotts.

Harry pulled the box toward him gently, taking in its appearance as if in a dream. He had never seen anything so elaborate or beautiful in all his days. Mind you, he had been raised in a cupboard under the stairs of Number 4 Privet Drive.

The first item that attracted his attention had been a silvery almost liquid type of material that lay folded in the box. Drawing it out carefully, it unfolded and flowed through his hands like water. Hagrid gasped then grinned. Harry examined it carefully.

"A cloak?"

"Not just any cloak, Harry. Thats an invisibility cloak, that is. Your father James loved that cloak, he used to get himself into all sorts of trouble under that thing." Hagrid said with a laugh.

Harry turned the cloak over in his hands, confused.

Hagrid smiled. "Its makes its wearer completely invisible." Hagrid clarified, "Came in very handy for James in the later days of the war.."

Harry looked at it in disbelief, he could have safely said it was the most amazing device he had ever laid eyes on, and was already thinking of uses for it. Hagrid, who must have seen the wheels in his mind ticking over gave him a stern look.

"Oi, don't go getting any brilliant ideas Harry. Just because your father was a trouble maker doesn't mean you can follow suit. Hogwarts is the safest place in the world, but dangers can still be found there. I mean it, no monkey business." Hagrid eyed him suspiciously.

Harry grinned sheepishly, being caught out completely. Sighing he folded the cloak neatly and placed it on Griphook's desk, and looked again into the silver box. In the back corner sat a slightly dusty velvet ring box, of a deep shade of purple. Harry eyed it with interest then picked it up carefully, examining its outside before opening the lid with a soft snap. It was then that he had first laid eyes on the ring.

Nestled in a velvet cushion it sat, a large silver ring that shined as it had the day it was made, which to Harry looked like centuries ago. It

was set with a large Garnet, and had elaborate engravings on either side. Hagrid looked over his shoulder and his mouth fell open.

"The Potter family ring.." Hagrid said in surprise.

Harry's head snapped up to look at the giant man. "You've seen it before?"

"James wore it."

"It has Mr Potter, been passed down the line of Potters for generation after generation." Griphook intercepted. "You see this engraving here," he motioned toward the engraving on the left side of the ring. "That is the Potter family coat of arms. The garnet represents the house of Gryffindor, The founder of Hogwarts to whom the Potters remain loyal. The engraving on the right is of course of the stag, but that is beyond my explanation to you."

Harry glanced to Hagrid to see if he would have an explanation, but he merely shook his head. "I asked once. "Ask me no questions i'll tell you no lies." he said. James was good like that." Hagrid smiled at the memory.

Harry fingered it carefully. Removing it gently from the box he slipped it over his middle finger in hopes that it would fit. It was however far too large for his skinny fingers and he slipped it off again with disappointment.

"I'll get you a chain for it, if you like.." Hagrid suggested gently.

Harry nodded gratefully, placing the ring back inside its box carefully and closing the lid...

He clutched the ring tightly as he went over that memory once more. The ring was large, extravagant yet awkward. The Potter family ring was the only thing of his parents that he possessed, he squeezed it tightly in the palm of his hand and imagined desperately that he were anywhere but here.

Even as he lay still he could feel it coming, a great surging pain that roared through his body, so unbearable he screamed out in agony. It

had been happening at least five times a day for excruciatingly long periods of time, until he felt he could bare it no longer, then it would subside. He had no idea what was happening, what was causing all the pain to scream through him as it did at these times. But he knew it was coming, and there was nothing he could do to stop it. He screamed out in pain, his body convulsing jerkily.

He knew his uncle would return to "shut him up" almost instantly. Every time he made the slightest noise it invoked another lengthy beating, which on top of all the others grew more painful every time.

Good, harry thought as the agony clouded his mind. Perhaps this time he will kill me. Perhaps this time will end it, finally.

To Harry, he really thought there wasn't much else his uncle could do that he had not done already. Vernon had taken particular pleasure in striking him repeatedly across the back with his hard leather belt with a particularly sharp belt buckle protruding off the end. As a result, flesh hung from the back of his rib cage in strips, where his Uncle had whipped him so severely and repeatedly that it had begun to fall away from the bone. This torn flesh had been left open for weeks, ripped apart again every time his uncle beat him.

His breathing was sharp, restricted and painful, due to several broken ribs that had left severe blackish purple and yellow bruises on his chest. Harry had at first underestimated the power of his uncles fists, but when he felt the first bone break under their force, he soon learned what the man was capable of. His broken leg was the handy work of a particularly nasty beating dating 9 days ago, he could feel the wound turning septic, and was grateful he did not have to look at it. His uncle had used his steel capped boots to stomp his leg until it snapped like a twig, then proceeded to kick harry in the stomach until blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. He would never forget the sound of the bone snapping under his uncles weight.

The fingers on his right hand had been dislocated one by one and stuck out at odd angles. Vernon had taken particular care to make sure that each dislocation created as much pain as possible. He told Harry he would save the other hand for a later date. One day about two weeks ago when Vernon had been feeling particularly creative he

had entered Harry's room smoking a cigar. He then proceeded to sit on Harry's broken rib cage and hold the burning cigar to Harry's flesh on his chest and arms several times until he was covered in circular burn marks. At that time the pain had been unbearable, but now Harry had so many other experiences to compare it too he was finding it hard to call that real pain at all.

As Harry writhed in agony he could feel the wounds on his back tearing open again, issuing a new more pungent smell than before. The lower half of his left leg hung limply as the bone tore at his flesh. The raw scars where the acid had burnt his eyes burned with new ferocity as he brought his bloodstained hands to his head, fearing it may explode with the pain that pulsated through his body.

Harry knew all to well that his magic could have healed these wounds fairly easily, could have, being the operative. As the unbearable pain forced its way through his body anger welled up strongly inside of his chest. Anger at the one man whom he had trusted to always do the right thing. Anger at the man who had bound his magic to prevent him from using it under any circumstances. To protect him..

... "Evictum Virtus!" Dumbledore said firmly as a jet of red light shot from his wand and wrapped its way like a snake around Harry's body, then disappeared.

Harry stared at the headmaster in disbelief. They were sitting in Dumbledore's office, Dumbledore had just informed Harry that he must either die or become a murderer before his fight with Voldemort would be over. Harry had yelled at him, venting his anger and hurt over Sirius' death. Sirius, his godfather, closest thing to a father he had ever known, had died moments ago when he fell through the veil.

"What did you do?" Harry asked in a threatening tone.

"Exactly what i told you i had to do. Its for your own good Harry. Its for your protection." the old man said eyeing the boy carefully.

Harry grabbed his wand pointing it viciously at the old man and yelled "Expelliarmus!"

Nothing happened.

"I had too Harry. You will understand one day." The man said sadly.

"You bound my magic.." he said, stunned.

"I had no choice, Harry." Dumbledore said quietly.

" How could you do that? I told you no way. What if Someone tries to kill me? What then? I'm defenseless!"

"No one can get to you at number 4 Privet Drive, Harry. That i have made sure of."

"Yeah, Yeah i bet you've got that all taken care of," Harry spat bitterly, "Just like every other minor detail of my life. Why can't you just keep out of it? I don't need your help! I don't need you at all!"

"Harry, you have to understand, now that Voldemort has revealed himself you are.."

"I don't have to understand anything!" Harry yelled, picking up a strange silver instrument from Dumbledore's desk and hurling it into the wall between two portraits of previous headmasters.

"Restore it. Now." he said angrily.

"Harry, i can't do that, its for your protection."

"If this is what you call protection, taking my magic from me, then i don't fucking want it. Restore my magic, now!"

"Getting angry will not solve anything Harry."

"Sirius is dead! If he was alive you would never have gotten away with this. He would have stopped you no matter what." Harry shouted.

"Sirius would have understood what must now be done."

"And if someone finds out you've rendered me powerless? What then? Do you have a 24 hour watch to come to my rescue?" Harry asked sarcastically.

"As i said Harry, No one can get to you at Privet Drive, no one can harm you while you remain in your uncles house."

"So you expect me to stay there all summer? By myself? Without magic?"

"I'm afraid that this time it is necessary Harry, you need too, for everyone's safety."

"I don't believe this." Harry muttered as he paced the office in frustration. "You knew i would never agree to you binding my magic so you do so when i am not in the least bit prepared. Completely unawares. You're an underhanded old bastard, did anyone ever tell you that?"

Dumbledore gave the boy a dark look. "I managed to bind your magic, did i not? There may be something to be said for being an 'underhanded old bastard', yet..."

Harry heard the footsteps pounding up the staircase, he felt the table next to his bed rattle against the wall as the room shook from the vibrations. He couldn't stop himself from screaming, the pain was to severe, more severe than anything his uncle had ever subjected him too, he felt as if he would pass out, he prayed that he would pass out.

Let it end this time, he thought drastically, let it end this time.

The footsteps grew louder. The same pulsing rhythm, Harry counted his steps inside his head. One, Two, Three, Four..

"Silence!" His uncle roared up the staircase.

..Five, Six, Seven, Eight...

The sound of his footsteps pounded in Harry's brain, drawing ever closer.

Nine, Ten, Eleven, Twelve..

A jet of pain made him scream out in agony.

"If the neighbors come knocking on my door again about someone screaming i swear to god i will kill you to be rid of the hassle!" His uncle shouted ahead of him as he continued up the staircase.

Thirteen, Fourteen, Fifteen, Sixteen..

It seemed to be taking an eternity for his uncle to reach his room. Harry groaned in agony, wishing he would just finish it.

Seventeen, Eighteen, Nineteen...

The footsteps ceased. And, for one shining moment all was calm in the Dursley house, calm until Harry's bedroom door burst open and he heard the wood splinter across the floor. He heard his uncle step inside the room, his heavy boots making the floorboards groan beneath him. Harry screamed out in agony again, writhing painfully on his bed until he fell onto the floor.

"Pathetic." His uncle spat at him as he looked down at the broken teenager.

He stepped forward, hoping that Harry would sense his movement and show his fear by flinching back, cowering away from him, trying to hide. But Harry did not, the pain was white hot, searing through his brain, the last thing he cared about was Vernon Dursley's pride. This however, may have been a mistake, for it only increased his uncles fury to be ignored. The man smirked as if he didn't care, an evil smirk, one that Harry would be glad he could not see.

"I'll give you something to scream about, boy." His uncles voice came through gritted teeth.

Chapter 3: Connected With a Memory

Harry hit the wall with a dull thud, coughing violently. Blood gurgled in his mouth, mingled with the saliva that he promptly spat out onto the floor. Wiping the excess away from his chin with the back of his injured hand, he listened carefully, attempting to determine where his uncle would attack from next. He cautiously felt the aching welt on his stomach where his Uncle's heavy boot had connected and launched him clear across the room. He could feel the brusing rising to the surface already, and with it came irepressable anger.

"That all you've got?" Harry said with a weakened grin, "My Uncle, I think you're losing your touch."

A fist caught his jaw unexpectedly and snapped his head to the right, causing white lights to pop into the blackness that was Harry's sight. Dazed, he shook his head and felt his jaw swell.

"Funny, " His uncle retorted, "You don't seem to believe that when I've got you screaming like a girl."

Harry snickered, attempting to mask his pain. A sharp kick from what felt like the steel capped boots caught him under his fifth rib, causing him to gasp painfully as all the air rushed out of his lungs. He would pay for his defiance greatly, he was well aware of this. Infact it was what he was aiming for, this time, he hoped that his defiance would get him killed. He had lived this nightmare for months now, barely able to move for the pain and suffering it caused. It was time to end it, once and for all.

"No uncle," he panted regaining his breath, looking up to where he believed his uncle to be in defiance, "I merely know that my screams give you pleasure, and who am i to deny you that joy?"

"Indeed." His uncle said forcibly through gritted teeth as he stomped down with all his weight on Harry's good leg.

Harry bit his lip so hard that blood spilled from the gashes in it, and he winced in agony. This fresh pain made him temporarily forget the torture he was being subjected too, and he took relief in its presence.

"Glad to see you're joining the party." His uncle said with a smirk noticing the wounds that he did not inflict on the boy's lips.

"Couldn't let you have all the fun now, could I?" Harry forced out with a smile.

Vernon smirked at the boy's attempts to anger him and realized his game. "What's the matter, Harry? Don't tell me you've had enough already? I never thought you were a quitter, I thought you would have had the defiant determination to hang on for as long as possible, if for nothing more than to torment me."

"Oh its tempting Uncle, believe me." Harry replied through gritted teeth, unable to disguise the venom and pure hatred in his voice.

"Well then, I suggest you get used to being around for a while yet Harry, because i have no intentions of making your departure from this world quick nor easy." His uncle sneered.

"Of course not." Harry replied casually. "If you killed me now, you'd go back to being poor, pathetic, snivelling, Vernon Dursley. And, with no one to assert your dominance over, Petunia would go back to having no interest in you whatsoever, because you'd be less than a man to her again. As long as I'm around to torture, you're her hero. As soon as im dead, you're nothing."

Harry could sense, rather than see, that dangerous puce color rising in his uncle's face, and he knew he'd accomplished what he had set out to do. His uncle was livid. He could almost feel him vibrating with anger.

"Don't you dare talk about her." He threatened.

"I'm sorry, It's sad really isn't it? That your wife is only turned on by you because of the fact that you beat the shit out of me every night. It's really something she should seek medical help for, I shouldn't laugh about it."

"I'm warning you.."

"Are you? Thats awfully considerate of you." Harry chirped, coming into his own.

Once again a fist collided with the side of his head, snapping it to his right and the white lights popped into the darkness once more, swimming before him like lightning bugs. Harry shook his head as if to clear it and gave a small chuckle.

"Well," He smiled, "You did warn me."

He sensed the two great pudgy hands lunge for his throat and close around his neck. He felt them squeeze painfully tighter as gravity pulled him upward to a standing position. Vernon held him by the throat with one hand, cutting his oxegen intake to a bare minimum. Harry found himself awkwardly balancing on his good leg, begining to feel his consciousness slide from him. Out of nowhere a solid object slammed into his good knee, causing him to scream out in pain as his leg buckled beneath him, causing him to slump to the floor in agony.

Vernon's hand grasped the knee fiercely and moved it from side to side, Harry almost passing out with the white hot pain as he screamed.

"My my.." Vernon muttered in interest. "It seems as though I shattered your knee cap. How intriguing."

"A keen observation." Harry spat through clenched teeth.

The back of his uncle's hand felt bony and rough as it slapped across his jaw.

"Don't tell me the knee cap was your climax?" Harry taunted in spite of himself.

He heard his uncle's breathing grow dangerously low and raspy. A fist caught him square in the ribs and forced all the air out of his lungs, followed by another, and another, and another. Blood trickled lightly down the corner of his mouth. Harry could feel his ribs cracking under the pressure of his uncles knuckles. Seemingly satisfied with the damage he had caused to Harry's chest, he moved onto the face once more, punching him hard in the nose, which broke on impact.

Harry grasped it securely with his good hand as blood came gushing out of it in a torrent, streaming down his chin and onto his chest. As the blood entered his mouth he spluttered repulsively, the warmth making him feel sick as it trickled down his throat. Vernon grabbed him by the hair and dragged him out into the middle of the room, tearing open the old wounds on his back. Harry clawed at his Uncle's hand desperately as he felt the hair being ripped from his head under his own weight. His fingernails sunk into his uncle's flesh successfully, enraging him further. He threw the boy aside, slamming his head into the wooden floor.

"How dare you touch me." Vernon spat on the boy's upturned face.
"You freak."

Harry heard him draw in a sharp intake of breath as he examined the puncture marks he inflicted, and he cursed under his breath.

"You'll pay for that boy." Vernon said quietly, then suddenly his footsteps retreated heavily from the room.

Harry could have laughed. Pay for that? How in God's name could he do anything worse than what he had already done? He listened to the pounding footsteps fade away across the landing and enter the master bedroom. Harry released a long held breath and winced as his ribs stabbed at him. He tried to move, drag himself to a more enclosed area, he felt exposed in the middle of the room, and somehow in more danger. He flinched as something shattered on the floor in the master bedroom and Vernon cursed loudly. Regaining his composure he attempted to drag himself away again, biting his lip to prevent himself from crying out in pain as his limp legs stretched from the weight.

After a series of muffled thuds and rustling, the footsteps pounded back toward Harry's room steadily, making the whole house vibrate with their hostility. Harry tried to drag himself more quickly but found the pain so unbearable that he didn't get far before Vernon's footsteps stopped right behind him.

"That's the awkward thing about being blind." He said, his voice filled with malice, "You can never tell when you're dragging yourself around in circles."

Before he could answer the flat of Vernon's boot connected with his back and shot him forward with such force that he fell to his side and rolled several feet. Dazed from the force he clawed his way back upright, clutching his head in his hand. The flow of blood from his nose started a fresh and he spat out a mouthful onto the floor, the taste overpowering his senses.

"What? No retort?" he said with a smirk. "I must be getting some of that 'touch' back then, am I?"

Harry felt something sharp slash the skin on his upper left arm. He felt the cut bulge open and burn hot in the cold air, followed by the warm flow of blood that he was sure he must be running out of. He clutched the wound tightly to keep the air off it.

"Here's something we havn't tried yet." Vernon said, highly proud of himself. "All this time, and I'd completely forgotten about knives. Can you believe it?"

He slashed at Harry's back, hitting bone, which caused Harry to scream out, more in horror than in pain.

"And knife's are so much fun too," Vernon continued, ignoring his scream, "I don't know what came over me."

"I'm guessing," Harry panted, "That you got lost in the moment.."

He felt the back of his uncle's hand across his jaw once more, and heard blood spatter across the wall. The knife came from the other direction and slashed his thigh open. The empty fist came around again and snapped his head in the other direction. Harry felt the bruising rising on his face, he knew it was swelling, his face had swollen and gone down, swollen and gone down for days on end. He was used to the process, the tightness, the stinging, the relief as it eased off. The fist came around again and snapped his head in the opposite direction.

Harry heard the knife clunk to the floor beside him. He felt Vernon's open hand close about his throat again, squeezing ever so slightly, just enough to restrict his breathing further. Harry wheezed uncomfortably, it was already hard enough to breath with his broken

ribs and severe swelling, and his uncle knew it. He increased his pressure slowly, and Harry knew he was watching him with great satisfaction as he felt the dizziness come on. Harry tried weakly to prise his Uncle's hands away from his throat, his own nails scraping his throat as he tried to dig beneath his uncles fat fingers that would not budge.

Vernon laughed, thouroughly enjoying himself as the boy grew weaker from lack of Oxygen. Harry desperately clawed at his uncle's hands, the sensation of not being able to breath becoming unbarable, he tried to scream but nothing emerged except a hoarse release of air which he could not regain.

He was floating. Lights swam before his darkness and he vainly tried to swipe at them, always missing. The weightlessness of his body was surreal and as all the sensation in his body seemed to vanish he believed for a moment he was dead; until his uncle released his throat and let him slide limply down the wall into a crumpled heap on the floor.

"Tomorrow then?" His uncle said as he stood up slowly, picking up the knife.

He turned and Harry heard his footsteps retreat out of the room. His door slammed shut. Footsteps echoed back to the master bedroom, then retreated down the staircase. Tears trickled from the corners of Harry's eyes, creating clean lines through the dried blood on his face. He lay in that crumpled heap for what must have been hours, not moving, barely breathing, tears flowing softly and silently down his face, over his chest.

In those long hours he wished that his uncle's coarse hands had squeezed the life out of him, not just left him in this pain and misery for another night. He thought that perhaps if he lay still enough his body might decide it was time to give up, and offer him the sweet release of death. As the seconds dragged by his thoughts swam through his mind. Thoughts of Dumbledore, his parents, Sirius. He wondered if Sirius and his parents were all together again now, at peace. The thought made him hope that soon he would be joining them in their peace and tranquility. Then he thought of Hermione.

"Harry.." Hermione said uneasily as her lips parted gently from his.

He looked her over with his dark green eyes, the whites tinged with pink from where his coarse tears had agitated them. They delved into her own deep hazel eyes, and he saw a beauty there that he could not describe, a beauty that had escaped his notice all these long years until a few moments ago. He saw a twitch of unease flicker through them and suddenly he looked away, mumbling a barely coherent apology.

"Don't apologize.." She said, gently lifting his head with her hand to look into his vibrant eyes once more.

She ran those same fingers gently down the side of his face, he closed his eyes at the sensation those fingers caused. Her hand traced around the back of his neck in a caressing touch that continued as she ran her fingers through the back of his hair. A pleasant shiver ran through his body from the base of his neck and jolted in his lower stomach. Reaching forward with his hand he gently caressed her face as he pulled her closer and kissed her deeply.

Placing her arms lightly around his neck she leaned back as his arms found their way around her upper body, their lips rarely parting as he leaned over her, sliding one hand gently under the back of her shirt. His hands felt rough against the sensitive skin of her back and she shivered at his touch, moving her hands slowly, caressingly down his back then up under his shirt. His lips curved into a smile feeling her delicate hands on his flesh, so soft and smooth. He kissed her bottom lip playfully, feeling her hot breath come in gasps past his cheek as he ran his hands over her back, fumbling with the clasp on her bra strap.

As he slid her shirt off over her head, her tangle of brown hair falling across her chest, he began kissing down her neck, feeling her body quiver beneath him. His lips on her neck sent waves of delight shooting through her body as she arched up to meet him. She moved a hand up and ran it gently through the back of his hair, her other hand tracing patterns up and down the skin of his back. His warm breath in her ear made her moan softly in pleasure as he slid her bra

straps from her shoulders, threading it off her arms and disguarding it carefully next to them.

As he looked down at her beautiful form he ran his hand down her side which gave her a jolt of pleasure as she leaned up and pulled the shirt off over his head, bringing his naked torso down onto her as their lips met once more. He groaned softly as he felt her fingertips brush around his side and down to the button of his pants where she fumbled awkwardly with the button and the zip. Through their kiss she gave a small laugh as she finally managed to undo them and slide them down slightly.

Harry smiled at her laugh, kissing her passionately as he ran his open hand up under her skirt on the inside of her thigh, causing her to gasp lightly, the cold of his hands increasing her longing for him. brushing his fingers lightly up her side to caress her breasts she moaned gently, running her hand up his muscular bare chest...

...A pain like somebody driving a pick axe through Harry's skull jolted him out of his memory so fast he jerked in alarm, screaming in agony. From this one point, several jolts of the same severing pain cut through him like shards of glass, shooting through every inch of his body. The pain was unbearable and he writhed on the ground, clutching his head in his hands, feeling that if someone were to rip it off his shoulders he would feel more comfort than he did at this moment.

The pain was so severe he had felt nothing like it ever before, the cratius curse paled in comparison to the torture this pain provided him with. For a fleeting second, Harry assumed that Vernon had crept up on him when he was preoccupied with his thoughts and decided to deliver the final blow. Only after a few seconds he realized he could hear his uncle's voice screaming up at him from the bottom of the staircase to shut up. The pain stabbed him like burning hot knives, piercing every inch of his body.

He jerked about on the floor, wondering if this was what death felt like, if this would be his final moments. Was this some kind of delayed reaction to all the physical torture he had endured in this room? Somehow it felt different, more severe, more powerful. It felt like

something he had almost forgotten what it was like to be in the presence of. It felt like magic. Dumbledore's words echoed in his head as he screamed in terror.

"..No one can harm you while you remain in your uncle's house.." .

He had of course meant, No wizard can harm you while you remain in your uncle's house. For it had been proved ten fold that he could be harmed within these walls, what was left of his flesh gave witness to that fact. But Harry knew that feeling, that power that ripped through his body. Something was burning into him so deeply he was near passing out from pain, and it was, without a doubt, magic of some form. However, according to Dumbledore's words, this was impossible.

Why should i trust him? Harry reasoned with himself through his agony. Look where's its got me so far? Lied too.. Sirius dead.. Attacked.. Tortured by my nearest living relative's husband.. Left for dead in his house..

No matter how delerious from pain he was, he knew magic when he felt its presence. The question was whose magic? And why? Had Voldemort finally discovered his weakness, that his magic was bound and come to finish the job? Had Dumbledore underestimated Voldemorts powers when he said that he would not be able to break through the anti-apparition/portkey wards? Harry was panicking, he knew if the pain did not kill him soon it would surely drive him insane. His thoughts flew to Frank and Alice Longbottom, and he struggled with the thought that he may soon be sharing a ward with them.

Explainations raced through his head as he thrashed about against the wall, now attempting to knock himself unconscious, praying that the pain would subside. If someone was trying to kill him, they were taking an awful risk at hanging around so long. He knew the ministry would be tracking any use of magic at his address. As though reading his thoughts, it seemed that soon it would be all over. As suddenly a great surge of pure burning pain seemed to explode from his body, and into his world of darkness a big swirling mass of light burst before him. As he lay flat on his back, temporarily paralysed with agony, he

stared into the mass of light that seemed to shoot off bolts every now and then, engulfing all of his vision.

"What the hell is going on here?" his uncle roared as he crashed through Harry's door and stopped dead in fear.

He can see it too. Harry thought to himself in a daze.

Vernon indeed saw the great domes of light engulfing his house, but he barely had time to acknowledge what was happening. Harry did not see him, nor what happened to him, He only heard the wall opposite him blow out as though something burst through it. Vernon spoke no more. He had been thrown from the room, right through the wall with tremendous force, tumbling head over heel down the narrow staircase and came to rest at the bottom of it in a daze. Realizing that something was horribly, horribly wrong, he staggered out of the entrance way and into the living room.

"Petunia?" He called out in alarm scanning the room for his wife.

"Here Vernon!" She called, her head emerged from behind the sofa, where Dudley and herself were cowering.

He leapt over to them faster than any of them had seen him move in his life and ducked down with them, fearing the worst. The boys magic had broken free.

An almost instant wave of relief passed over Harry as he lay staring at the light, the pain began to subside. The underlying pain of his injuries remained, but it was nothing in comparison to what he had just experienced. He found his parents silver ring and clutched it in his good hand, squeezing it tightly, his only link to reality. But then he heard it. The sound of glass cracking and splitting slowly, like when it has been heated rapidly then subjected to severe cold. Alarmed, he held his breath in his chest, listening to the cracking noises. After a few seconds he realised that within the great mass of light, tiny cracks were beginning to form.

What now? he thought desperately.

He could feel the pressure of the magic building steadily, and as it did, more cracks appeared, sprouting off of cracks in the dome of light. He watched them grow as if in a dream, completely detatched. He felt it first, the pressure surge. Then came the shattering noise as all the cracks merged and pieces of the dome began to fall around him and dissapear. But before the last pieces hit the ground their was a strange tugging at his navel and he was spinning uncontrollably through the air. He had felt this sensation before. When he touched the cup in third task of the triwizard tornament...

He landed with a thud on what felt like a rich throw rug that covered a hard wooden floor. Silence. The sound of silence overwhelmed him and he realised that he was no longer at Number 4, Privet Drive. All was black again, he could not see anything. He reached his hand out slowly to raise himself to a sitting position, attempting to sense if he really was alone. In the confusion, he had almost forgotten that his body was broken, and the movement on his part caused a severe jolt of pain which made him yell out and slump back to the floor. Overpowering dizziness came over him and he again experienced the weightless feeling his uncle had given him earlier when he had choked him. From somewhere around him he heard approaching footsteps, but could not move to protect himself. Through his sliding consciousness a form of light appeared in the black, stopped then moved towards him in haste.

The figure of light knelt down next to him and put its fingers to his throat, breathing shallow breaths as if frightened. Her smell reminded him of something he couldn't place, a smell connected to a memory.

"James?" A woman's voice called in distress, "James! In here! Come quickly!"

Her voice was the last thing Harry heard as his consciousness faded away, and all became dark and restful.

Chapter 4: As We Wind On Down The Road

"Dad, Harry is a nice guy, he's not a monster" Hermione argued angrily.

"Oh? I see, well that makes everything alright then does it? He's a nice guy so its all "la de da"? You're Pregnant Hermione, Pregnant. It doesn't matter how nice he bloody is it doesn't change the fact that he got you pregnant. You're both bloody irresponsible. I thought you were better than this." He shouted in his disappointed angry voice.

"It was an accident dad." Hermione said through gritted teeth.

"One that would never have happened if you both stopped to think for a second what the consequences might have been." Hermione's mother piped up with a frown.

"We were both upset.. It just happened. There wasn't any 'thinking' involved." Hermione yelled.

"Exactly! You see? You're both completely irresponsible. Well you've got yourselves into one hell of a mess now. What are you going to do? Huh? Have you even thought about that?" Her father yelled in satisfaction.

"Of course I have." Hermione said indignantly. "Harry and I will raise this baby together."

"What?" Her father exploded.

"You heard me." Hermione said, crossing her arms.

"Don't get smart with me young lady. You can't be serious? You want to raise this child with that boy?" Her father said incredulously.

"Yup. Thats what I said, didn't I?" Hermione said calmly.

Hermione's father's nostrils flared dangerously, which she took as a sign to shut her mouth.

"Oh yes, and babies don't cost anything to raise? You have no money, no stable environment, you're both still at school for God's sake! How can you possibly think that that's an option?" he roared.

"Its the only option dad." Hermione said firmly.

"I've seen that boy, the clothes he wears, the way he presents himself. It's obvious he couldn't be poorer. He has nothing to offer you Hermione, he's just lowly scum!" He retorted.

Hermione gritted her teeth. "No dad, what's obvious, is that you don't know the first thing about Harry. And as for still being at school, we'll find a way to work things out. Things will have to change obviously."

Hermione's father snorted, cutting her off. "You think?"

"Yes Dad, I managed to figure that one out all on my own." Hermione said sarcastically.

"Hermione enough of your attitude.." He warned.

"Well you're not even trying to listen to me, or even understand anything I say about this. You don't even want to know anything about Harry, you just want to judge him!" she yelled angrily, tears stinging her eyes.

"What makes you think he'll want anything to do with you when he finds out? What makes you think he won't abandon you and refuse to accept responsibility?" he asked aggressively.

"Because I know him! Alright? I know him better than anyone else! And if you'd just listen to me.."

"I don't want to listen to you Hermione!" Her father shouted angrily, pausing. "I'm disappointed in you. I'm disappointed, and I never ever thought that i would be disappointed in you..."

Silence filled the car for many long awkward minutes. Hermione seemed to vibrate with suppressed anger. Suddenly she began to speak in a very strained voice.

"His name is Harry James Potter. James after his father. His father who was murdered along side his mother when Harry was one year old. His Godfather was blamed for their murders' and sent to the wizarding prison for 13 years before he escaped. Harry was sent to live with his mother's sister and her husband, and their child Dudley. They made Harry live in a cupboard under their staircase until he was

11 years old, when they were forced to alter that. They refused to acknowledge his presence, never gave him birthday or christmas presents, never allowed him to have friends or do anything fun.

"Dudley made his life hell, by bullying him and turning his whole school against him. His uncle and aunt lived in fear that he would turn out to be a "freak" like his mother. When the letter for Hogwarts came they tried to ignore it, they never told him he was a wizard. They told him that his parents had died in a car crash, that his father couldn't hold down a job and was a useless bum. He never knew they were wizards until Hagrid came and forcibly removed him from the Dursley's to take him to Hogwarts.

"Harry has been forced to return there every summer, where he only gets hand me down rags to wear, and barely gets anything to eat, they lock him in his room and bar his windows, and tell the neighbors he's a troubled child. Every summer it gets worse, they beat him, and more than once he's had to be rescued to be able to return to school. He's heir to his parents fortune, he's not poor at all. He's one of the most intelligent wizards at Hogwarts, and definitely is the most powerful. He's been living under the shadow of the fact that he must either die at the hands of his parents murderer, Voldemort, or kill him himself.

"At the end of last term, his godfather, Sirius, died when Voldemort tricked Harry into coming to his rescue at the ministry of magic. Harry blames himself for Sirius' death. He feels like he has no one left now. And at this moment he's sitting in his locked bedroom at the Dursley's, thinking God knows what because we're not allowed to write to him in case our owls are intercepted, Dumbledore's orders. People hate Harry for no reason, they judge him, last year the whole school thought he was mental until Voldemort showed himself.

"So don't act like you know anything about him, either of you. This isn't his fault, its mine. So leave him out of this. I don't care if you're angry, or disappointed, or whatever you are. What's done is done and Harry and I will raise this child whether you approve or not. So you might as well accept the fact that you're going to be grandparents, because I am not getting rid of this child." She finished crossing her arms.

Hermione's father gave a dry cough. All the color had drained from his face and he shifted uncomfortably in his seat, seeming to focus more intensely on his driving. Her mother had her hand over her mouth in shock, and was staring unknowingly in the rear-view mirror obviously lost in deep thought. Hermione threw her legs up onto the seat and leaned against the car door.

"Good." she said. "Make a left up here." she motioned to her father.

"So uh, his parents left him a fortune, you said?" Her father said in a polite attempt to make conversation.

"Yes. A very large fortune, not to mention the Black fortune that he's inherited from Sirius, his godfather. The Potter's were a very wealthy and influential family in wizarding society, they were very prominent in the fight against Voldemort. Everyone admired Lily and James for their courage and determination." Hermione said sounding like the text book they knew and loved.

"Oh, I see. I thought you said his godfather was blamed for Harry's parents murders?" He asked again dryly.

"Well, he was. They thought that Sirius had betrayed the Potters location to Voldemort, and he went to Azkaban for 13 years. He escaped in our third year and came to find Harry. We thought he was trying to kill him, but it turns out that he was trying to find Wormtail, his and James friend from high school, who had been hiding out in the form of a rat for 13 years. It was Wormtail who was the traitor. But Wormtail escaped and returned to Voldemort, so we couldn't clear Sirius' name, he had to spend his last few years in hiding, but at least he was free. It was Wormtail who helped Voldemort return to his body at the end of our fourth year."

"Oh." her father said gulping.

"Funny name for a man really, Wormtail. Even if he is a wizard, its a bit, well, primitive isn't it?" Her mother piped up.

Hermione shook her head in disbelief. "Its the name of his animagus form mom, Rat - Wormtail?"

"Oh.. now i see."

"His real name is Peter Pettigrew."

"Ah.."

"Ok, so you'll have money. But do you really think you're ready for this kind of commitment Hermione? Its a huge step, And you're only 16, both of you." her father interrupted as if he had not heard anything his wife had just said.

"We have time to prepare ourselves for it dad. No one wanted this to happen, of course we aren't ready for it, but we will be. We just need time to adjust to this." She said firmly.

"And Harry? What if, IF Hermione, he doesn't want anything to do with this? What are you going to do then?" he asked quietly.

"Dad he wouldn't abandon me."

"But if he does?" He said desperately. "I'm not asking you to revoke your trust in him Hermione, i just want to make sure you're prepared for both outcomes. If he doesn't want anything to do with this child, then what? Have you thought about that?"

"I've thought about it." She said quietly.

"And?" he pressed.

"Then i'll do it on my own." she said in quiet determination.

"Hermione.." he began.

"Don't dad. I've made my decision. Either way i'm having this baby. I'm sorry if thats not what you want.."

"I don't want my daughter to get hurt. I don't want you to have to go through this alone, thats what i don't want." he said.

"Thats not going to happen. I know Harry. Everything's going to be ok dad, i promise." she said as if she were trying to convince not only him but herself as well.

Conversation died for the present time as outside Hermione's window the dreary countryside whipped by. Dark rain clouds had crept in without warning and it was not long before heavy rain plummeted down to the earth. Hermione knew they were not far, perhaps 10 minutes away, from Little Whinging. Ten minutes away from facing up to the consequences of her actions, ten minutes away from facing up to her responsibilities. She thought of Harry, how he would probably consider this visit a completely unexpected yet pleasant surprise. that is until he heard what she had to say.

She found herself wondering how he would react to the news that he would soon be a father. Not only that, the father to a child carried not by his lover, but by his best friend. The closer they drew to privet drive, the more Hermione's stomach clenched into nervous knots. She had become so worked up that she was now terrified of facing him, terrified that he might abandon her. After all, he had enough problems as it were on his own.

"What street?" Her fathers voice abruptly broke her train of thought.

She looked out the window in alarm to discover they were heading into Little Whinging. Panicking she choked out the words "Privet Drive" before she could think better of it.

"What number?" He asked casually.

"4" she said, shifting uneasily in her seat. "Number 4"

"And his Aunt and Uncles names?"

"Vernon and Petunia.."

"Dursley?"

"Yeah.."

"There it is dear, Privet Drive." Hermione's mother said pointing out the old fashioned street sign.

"Listen.. can't we do this some other .." Hermione began.

"No. We're doing it now, we're getting everything out in the open, so everybody knows exactly where they stand. It's better to do it now Hermione. There's no point delaying the inevitable." her father said sternly.

"I guess.." she said her stomach flipping wildly. She thought for a fleeting moment that perhaps she could miraculously dive out of the moving car door and make a run for it, but decided that there was no way she could make it.

"Number 4 Dear, just here." Her mother's voice came again.

"Ah right here we are, right Hermione.." Just as he said it something odd happened. An electrical charge seemed to race through the air, and a large dome appeared in a flash enveloping number four privet drive.

The dome of light flickered in and out of focus for several seconds, causing Hermione's parents to stare in shock. Hermione sat bolt upright her eyes fixed on the fluorescent dome of light. Suddenly there was a great boom which caused Mrs Granger to shriek and cover her ears. The boom shattered the car windows, and blew out the windows of all the houses on the street, covering Hermione and her parents in fragments of glass.

"What in the name of.." Hermione's father shouted as he threw his hands over his head. His voice was cut off by another gigantic boom. The great dome of light began to crack, flickering dangerously in and out of focus.

"Harry.." Hermione whispered in wonder.

"Hermione" Her father yelled. "What's happening?"

"I don't know! Something's not right.." she replied loudly, frantically opening the car door and stepping out.

"Young lady get back in this car right now!" He yelled in distress.

Suddenly the Dome exploded, bursting into millions of shards as it fell to the ground like broken glass. The fluorescent light vanished and

number 4 appeared to steam in the cold night air. Hermione raised her hand to her mouth in shock. She raised her eyes to where Harry's bedroom window was set on the outside of the house. It appeared from exterior damage that this was where the magic had forced its way out of the house. The window frame was blown outwards with tremendous force, leaving it dangling precariously from a severed hinge. A steam like substance billowed from the gaping hole and rose up into the dark night sky.

She was half expecting half hoping that Harry would appear at that gaping hole with a sheepish grin on his face and shout a humored apology down to her. But as the steam kept flowing out steadily she realized that he would not be doing that. Whatever just happened was no experiment gone wrong, no accident, it was serious and extremely powerful magic, and she did not like the feel of it. Suddenly she awoke from her shocked state and realized that something was horribly, horribly wrong.

"Harry!" She screamed as she flew towards Harry's uncles front door.

"Hermione!" Her father shouted after her, climbing awkwardly out of his open car door. "Hermione!"

"Stop her John!" Hermione's mother screeched as she clambered out of the destroyed car.

"Hermione stay away from there! It might not be safe!" He yelled, chasing her frantically. His words did not reach her, at least did not reach her conscious mind, she reached the front door long before her father shouted them.

"Alohamora!" She shouted in panic, throwing the door open forcefully.

Her thunderous footsteps pounded up the staircase fiercely, not waiting to check for any other occupants of the house. She tore towards Harry's bedroom door and wrenched at the door handle. It did not budge, she had forgotten in her panic that they locked him in at night time.

She cried out angrily in frustration, screeching "Alohamora" at the lock so forcefully the door flew open without her touching it.

A horrible stench washed over her like a tidal wave as the door flew open. The most pungent odor she had ever encountered, so strong it made her ill. Wretching she fell to her knees and crawled into his room, one hand covering her nose and mouth. The room was pitch black but for the silvery steam substance that had almost completely disappeared out the gaping hole where Harry's barred window had been. She felt something slick under the hand she was crawling along the floor with and stopped abruptly, gagging as she felt around for her wand in her pocket.

"Lumos!" She said in a muffled voice, holding the wand high above her head.

The harsh white light filled the room instantly, causing her to blink rapidly as her eyes watered from the pressure of adjusting to the drastic change. At first things looked as they should have to her eyes, but after a few moments she realized that nothing in this room was as it should have been. Her hand dropped from her mouth and nose, suddenly the smell did not seem to register with her senses. The hand that held up her wand was slick with blood that was now trickling down her pale wrist, as she looked to the floor she could see that the floorboards were thick with trails of it, as though he had been dragging himself around in circles on the floor.

On his bed lay two sets of broken cold steel shackles that were rusty and jagged, stained with old dried on blood. His trunk had been thrown across the room, his bookshelf lay broken on the floor. The sheets on his bed were torn and soaked in fresh blood, which had mingled with old blood which had crusted. Next to her hand on the floor she picked up a small white object, a piece of broken tooth. Her hand shook uncontrollably as she placed it carefully back on the floor where it had been.

Next to his bed a pile of charred books lay where they had been set alight, his school books. In the midst of the pile she removed what was left of his defense against the dark arts book from the year before. As she tried to open it up the book disintegrated in her hands. Her eyes fell on his robes which lay shredded next to his books in a discarded pile, along with Hedwig's battered cage. There was no sign

of the snowy owl. Just as there was no sign of Harry anywhere in the room, just evidence that he had been there not long before.

Hermione's wand fell absently from her hand, clunking to the floor beside her. Unable to support her own weight she curled over her knees in choking sobs. Tears poured down her face as she cried in agony, tears mixing with Harry's spilt blood.

"Dear God.." Came her father's horrified voice from behind her as he entered the room, bringing his hand to his mouth and nose. "Where is he?"

Hermione could not answer her father, the lump in her throat was pure agony as she choked out her tears, repeating only Harry's name over and over.

"No. Don't love, don't come in here." Mr Granger said, putting an arm up to prevent his wife from entering the room.

"What is it? What is that smell? John let me in." She said frantically. "Is Hermione ok? Hermione?" She pushed passed her husband's arm and stopped in horror. All color drained from her face as she clutched her husbands arm.

"I told you you can't come up here!" Roared another male voice from behind her father. Vernon Dursley barged his way passed John Granger and pushed him backwards out of the room. "What the bloody hell do you think you're playing at? This is breaking and entering this is! I could sue you!"

"What have you done?" Mr Granger asked in horror.

"It's none of your business. What did you do with him? Where is he?" Mr Dursley roared angrily, scanning the room for Harry.

"We were about to ask you the same question." Mr Granger said through gritted teeth. "He's an innocent boy! What have you done?"

Vernon scanned the room again quickly, then suddenly noticed Hermione on the floor, he had not seen her huddled there the first time.

"You." He said through gritted teeth, marching towards her, fists clenched. "You're one of them, Aren't you? You broke him out didn't you? You little bitch, what do you think you're doing, meddling in other people's business? I'll give you a life lesson girly, its not a wise move, you could get yourself hurt." Vernon grabbed her by the collar of her robes and yanked her to her feet, causing her to yell. "What did you do with him? Bring him back now or i swear you'll pay for this."

"Get your hands off my daughter you son of a bitch!" John Granger yelled fiercely as he came up behind Vernon Dursley, planting his fist into the side of the man's jaw.

Vernon released Hermione involuntarily, falling sideways and crashing into Harry's bed, hitting the side of his head, knocking himself out with a sickening crack. Hermione jerked her head away in shock as Vernon hit the floor. From the doorway a woman shrieked and tore into the room, kneeling beside Harry's unconscious uncle.

"Vernon? Vernon!" she shrieked, shaking the mans shoulders. "What have you done to him?" he cried angrily rounding on Mr Granger.

"He'll be fine." John said dismissively. "As for Harry i'm not so sure. How could you let this happen? Where is he?" He roared at the woman, hoping to scare her into submittance.

"I don't know! There was no way he could leave! He should be right here!" She yelled defensively.

"What do you mean there was no way he could leave?" Hermione asked frantically, "What did you do to him?"

"He.." she began slowly.

"Speak up!" Hermione's father roared.

"Vernon beat him.."

"I'd say he did more than beat him!" Mr Granger yelled in frustration.

Petunia looked down at her unconscious husband for a moment, then raised her eyes to meet Mr Grangers. "Vernon found out something..

he caught Harry writting a letter to one of his friends.. Something we forbade him to do.. He confiscated the letter. It said, It said that Dumbledore had bound his magic.. that he couldn't use his magic.. under any circumstances at all.. leaving him in effect powerless."

Hermione gasped in shock. "No... No you're wrong. Dumbledore wouldn't do that to Harry. Why would he do that?"

"I don't know." Petunia said shakily. "All I know is that Vernon was elated, Harry couldn't scare us into submission anymore, we didn't need to fear him. Vernon, he was vengeful.. he beat Harry. Until he couldn't walk, I.. I think he broke his legs."

Hermione looked away disgusted, feeling her stomach lurch, tears fell down her cheeks in despair.

Petunia continued. "He.. he took acid up there one day.. I never saw what he had done.. but he told me.. he told me that he made sure he would never see again.."

"That's enough.." Hermione's father said looking away from the woman to see his daughters face.

"He whipped him many times.. he made me come in and clean the wounds the first few times. After a while he refused to let me in.." Petunia carried on in a daze.

"I said thats Enough!" Mr Granger roared as Hermione collapsed to the floor in tears.

Petunia jumped with fear at the fierceness in his voice. Mrs Granger ran to her daughter, taking her in her arms and holding her tightly. Mr Granger ran his hands through his hair helplessly, spinning around on the spot taking in the horrors of the room. His frustration grew as he saw the blood trails on the floor.

"Where is he? What did you do with him? You said yourself he couldn't leave on his own! So what did you do with him?" He yelled at her.

"Nothing, he was here. I know for a fact that he was here! I can't explain it!"

"You listen to me.." Hermione's father started moving towards her.

"Dad no!" Hermione shouted. "Leave her. Just leave her. We need to contact Dumbledore. Now. He's the only one who can answer for this."

Getting to her feet Hermione stumbled to Harry's broken desk, rumaging about for a piece of parchment and a quill in his trunk. Emerging with both she scrawled a hurried note and rolled it up, looking about the room for Hedwig.

"Harry's owl, Did he kill it?" Hermione asked Petunia in a choked voice.

"No." she said quietly. "He tried. It scratched his face when he tried. He never could catch it. He was livid with that bird.."

"Hedwig?" Hermione called softly, turning away from the woman with disgust.

After a long silence she called again. After a few moments there was a rustling noise from within Harry's wardrobe. A very thin, ruffled looking snowy owl emerged slowly from the crack in the wardrobe doors, hooting woefully.

"Hedwig!" Hermione said in relief, taking the owl in her arms and stroking her softly. The owl hooted again, as if trying to tell Hermione of all the troubles she had witnessed. Harry had obviously not been able to feed her, as she was barely skin and bone. She shuddered thinking about what injuries would have kept Harry from taking care of Hedwig, he always took such good care of her, she was his best friend in this house. Seeing a bag of owl treats in the open trunk, Hermione took one and fed it to the owl who accepted it gingerly.

"It's ok girl, its me Hermione remember? I need you to take this to Dumbledore, we need him to help us find Harry. Ok Hedwig? Go as fast as you can."

The owl pecked her finger affectionately and soared out of the gaping window.

Hermione crumpled to the ground in exhaustion. Her mother rushed to her side once more, stroking her hair gently. Her father walked over and knelt down beside them, hugging them both firmly, Harry's cold blood soaking through his pants at the knee.

"How long will he take?" Hermione's father asked quietly.

"Not long. Hedwig knows its urgent." Hermione said quietly through tears.

Time seemed to fly by in a dream as they waited for Dumbledore's presence. Hermione sat mesmerized by Harry's blood, the slick, shining pools glimmering beneath the glow of the streetlights outside. Harry's pain and torment rose up out of those pools to haunt her as she sat on the stained wooden floor, streaked with his blood.

After what seemed only mere seconds there was a loud crack and the old wizard appeared out of thin air. Petunia screamed and huddled closer to Vernon who groaned weakly from the floor. Hermione jumped to her feet and rounded on Dumbledore before he could get his bearings, leaving her parents struggling to get off the floor and chase her.

"How could you?" She yelled furiously through her blinding tears.
"How could you leave him here?"

"Miss Granger I.."

"How could you leave him here with no protection against that monster?" she screamed, cutting him off as she pointed an accusatory finger at Vernon Dursley.

"Miss Granger if you would .."

"Look! Look at what theyve done!" She yelled, pointing at the blood on the floor, the bloodstained sheets, the shackles, the tooth. "They burnt his eyes out with acid!" she screamed. "You selfish old bastard!"

How could you leave him here? How could you leave him here when he begged you not to make him come back? Look what you've done!"

"Hermione Calm down!" Her father pleaded.

"Calm down?" She laughed a scornful laugh. "Harry's been tortured up here for months! He's been here in agony for months! No one to rescue him, no one to talk too, no one to help him! No! I will not calm down!"

"Miss Granger please sit down." Dumbledore said calmly. All the color had drained from his face as he absorbed his surroundings, his eyes fell on Petunia Dursley huddled next to her semi conscious husband. He gave her a look that said he wanted to be sick at the sight of her, then turned to the Grangers. Hermione was shaking with silent rage and her parents were white with shock, each standing either side of their daughter, concerned at her behaviour.

"Miss Granger, May I ask why you came here in the first place?" Dumbledore directed at her firmly.

Hermione looked taken aback for a moment, and temporarily, her anger vanished and her mind went blank. She knew she couldn't tell him the truth, but for some reason a lie was hard to form when being probed so suddenly.

"I was worried about Harry. I wanted to come and visit him.." She tried to sound sincere, and when she realised he was skeptical, she added hastily. "It's your fault! you're the one who said we couldn't write."

She shot a furtive glance at her parents, who knew from this frightening glare that under no circumstances should they call her out on the lie. Fortunately for her, neither of them showed any signs of speaking up.

She knew that Dumbledore didn't quite believe her, but at the same time she gained a mild satisfaction from knowing that he knew she was lying. He did not deserve the truth in her opinion, and she wanted to be sure that her feelings were indeed known to him. Dumbledore raised an eyebrow, examining her carefully before

frowning. The determined stubbornness in her glare told him more than her words did.

"I see." He said quietly. "You came to check on Harry, is that it?"

"Yes"

"No particular reason why? No cause for your sudden visit? No reason to be concerned enough to drive an hour across the country with your parents at this time of night?" He probed, and Hermione disliked the suspicion she heard in his voice.

"No. Just a feeling." she clarified.

"A feeling, Miss Granger?" He inquired.

"A feeling that he needed me.. Thats all." She said shortly in reply.

Dumbledore frowned again in what was soon becoming an annoying habit to Hermione.

"Very well." He said finally. "About the same time Hedwig reached me i got an owl from the ministry of magic informing me that the anti portkey wards, anti apparition wards and other magical protections i have placed on this household were completely obliterated." He said clearly and calmly.

Hermione gasped, everything finally falling into place. "We saw them come down." she said angry at herself for not recognising what had happened.

Dumbledore nodded solemnly and continued. "Only a very powerful magic could have destroyed those barriers."

"Voldemort.." Hermione interrupted in dispair.

"No. Voldemort could not have done this." Dumbledore assured her. "Only Harry's magic could have done this. You can imagine my surprise, as i bound his magic myself. Something i regret very greatly now, obviously." he added, seeing Hermione's look.

"He set his magic free?" She asked, her astonishment at this revelation overpowering her anger for the present time. "How?"

"I don't believe that even Harry knew what his magic was doing. I think, Miss Granger, that it set itself free. I think it forced itself out of his body."

"But why, why would it do that?" She asked in surprise.

"It is obvious to me, after witnessing this room, that the extent of Harry's torture and physical damage was far beyond the threshold of pain that any normal man could stand. I think his magic forced its way out of bondage in attempts to heal him, to save him from the unbearable pain he was in." Dumbledore said pacing the room, appearing to be lost in thought.

Hermione's stomach lurched, imagining what terrors would be so painful that his magic would force itself out of his body to heal him.

"But where is he?" Hermione asked carefully, fearing she may not like the answer.

The old man stopped and looked at her, absorbing her question. He frowned, then began pacing again, stroking his beard absently as his eyes searched the room. Hermione waited as the old man seemed to toss theories around in his head, every now and then shaking his head and muttering to himself. Sometimes "Perhaps.. But maybe.." or "No.. No that's impossible.. But what if.."

Abruptly he stopped and turned to face her. "The anti-portkey wards were destroyed, as were the apparition barriers. It is possible, that somehow he apparaeted out."

"He doesn't have his liscence yet, we havn't learnt how!" Hermione stated throwing his theory out the window. "Unless his magic did it." she said skeptically.

Dumbledore frowned. "It is unlikely, However, perhaps he used a portkey to escape from here."

"A portkey?" Hermione said quizzically. "How would he get a portkey? He wouldn't just carry one around with him."

"I at first thought the same thing. But I don't have any other reasonable explanation. You were here when the wards collapsed, there was no time for anyone to apparate in and take him, you would have seen it. Either he somehow came into contact with a portkey that he was unaware of, or like you say, his magic disapparated him from the house." Dumbledore said, sounding slightly frustrated that he could only stab in the dark for answers.

"But if that's the case.. Then where did it take him?" Hermione asked frantically.

"Your guess, Miss Granger, is as good as mine."

Chapter Five: I Reach For The One Who Bleeds

Hermione sat on her quilted bed as the light began to fade from the sky outside of her bedroom. Seven days had passed since she had forced her way into Harry's bedroom at Privet Drive to discover that he was nowhere to be found. Every detail of what she had found in that room haunted her waking thoughts and her nightmares. As the seventh day approached the seventh night, she found her hope began to drain away. She had been sitting here, in this exact same spot, day in day out for the past four days. Harry remained missing without any leads.

Food had not passed her lips during that time, despite constant nagging from her mother, father and sister. They had left it on the table in her room regardless every meal time, and only looked more disappointed than before when they collected it hours later, untouched. She was too worried, too preoccupied to even consider eating. She could not get the horrible images of Harry's bedroom to stop spinning through her mind. They were mingled with terrifying thoughts of where he may be right at this moment, lying battered and broken, maybe dying.. maybe already dead. She could not prevent her worst fears from surfacing and plaguing her thoughts constantly. They consumed her and defeated her, and for once in her life she felt completely helpless.

A soft knocking came to her ears and she lifted her eyes a fraction to the doorframe, where Anna's face appeared slowly from behind the opening door. She had taken to knocking before entering ever since Hermione had arrived home with her parents and a strange looking old man much later on that fateful night than she had expected. She had waited for hour after hour for their return, and was beginning to get worried as the clock approached 1am. She had just begun to play around with the thought that perhaps her father had finally gone over the deep end and committed mass murder when a loud crack came from the living room.

At first Anna had been slightly alarmed by the sudden appearance of her family and the slightly senile looking fourth member of the party, but her panic was soon replaced by concern as she took in the pale, withdrawn faces of all four of them. It was obvious that Hermione had

been crying for some length of time by the redness of her eyes and the streaks that cut down her face from sharp tears. She was even more alarmed to see that nearly all of them were covered in traces of blood. Hermione had been so distraught, so ready to take action that she had fled up to her bedroom to prepare before Anna could even ask what was going on. That girl from seven days ago was a far cry from the girl who sat before her now so utterly destroyed.

"You're going to wear a hole in that floor if you keep staring at it like that." Anna said with a gentle smile as she clicked the door shut behind her and moved into the room.

When Hermione made no attempt at responding Anna sighed and sat down heavily on the bed next to her sister, placing an arm around her shoulders. Hermione barely acknowledged her comforting touch and the movement of the bed aggravated her, the movement made all of it real. She almost had herself believing that if she did not move, none of it would be real, that it would all be some kind of surreal dream.

"Talk to me kid." Anna persisted, gazing at her pale sister in concern.

Hermione sighed and turned to look at her sister with a hollow stare. "What's there to talk about?"

"How you're feeling?" Anna tried, ignoring the tone of her last question.

Hermione snorted.

"Ok, so maybe not how you're feeling." Anna recovered cheerfully, then her tone turned dark. "Try what's bothering you, what you're thinking about that has had you glued to this spot for four days and why you aren't eating."

"Don't Anna I'm not in the.."

"Mood, yeah, so you've said." She finished her sentence. "Look, Dumbledore has assured you that he is doing everything in his power to locate Harry. There's nothing more that you can do. Sitting here feeling sorry for yourself is not helping anyone."

Hermione snorted again. "Yeah, he's doing everything in his power, you don't know what he did Anna, if he hadn't meddled with Harry's magic this would never have happened. How can I trust him now?"

"Well, you're just going to have to try. Besides, It's not just Dumbledore looking is it? He said that The Order of The Pheonix were looking for him too."

"The Order," Hermione said in a scornful voice, "Think that I had something to do with his disappearance."

"What?" Anna said in shock, "You're not serious?"

"Oh, I am." She said dangerously, "Very serious. Those "Minor Details" they wanted me to help them with, that turned out to be a full blown interrogation. They think I know more than I'm letting on."

"But that's crazy! Why would you have anything to do with it?" Anna asked in disbelief.

"I don't know, they think that my being there at the exact moment that he disappeared is suspicious." She said waving a hand in dismissal.

"Surely Dumbledore told them that its ludicrous to even think that you would be involved?" She asked incredulously.

"I think he's the driving force behind the theory actually." She said darkly.

"Well," Anna said carefully, "Don't worry, when Harry is found they'll discover their theory is completely ungrounded."

Hermione fell silent, and overwhelming despair filled her gut.

"What is it, Hermione?" Anna asked, seeing the change in expression.

"Anna, you didn't see what we saw! He could be lying somewhere, alone, unable to get help! He could be dead.."

"So that's what it is." Anna said, finally understanding. "You're worried that it's too late. You're worried that he might already be dead. Hermione .."

"Anna you didn't see his room.. " Hermione began, tears forming fresh in her eyes.

"Hermione.. Harry is going to be fine.." Anna said in a soothing, consoling voice.

"How can you say that? You don't know that.." Hermione retorted angrily.

Anna bit her lip gently and frowned. She looked remarkably different from Hermione, her shoulder length, dark brown hair hung dead straight and was pulled back in a tight ponytail. Her almond shaped eyes were deep green and held beauty that Hermione didn't see in hers. Anna was more rebellious than Hermione, and although there was no hint of magic in her veins, that fact didn't bother her in the slightest. She was tall, slender and extremely good looking. Hermione had never known her to go without a boyfriend for longer than a week.

"Hermione, they will find him.."

"I wish I could believe you, Anna. It's been seven days now, seven days since he dissapeared and no sign of him anywhere. People just don't dissapear, something's wrong." she said desperately.

"Hermione, where ever he is, I am sure he's being taken care of." Anna said calmly.

"The first places I checked were the hospitals! St Mungos, every muggle hospital I could find. He wasn't in any of them. How can he be taken care of if he's not in hospital!" She said angrily, her temper rising.

"Hermione, you need to relax, get some sleep, you're exhausted.." Anna said, trying to play down her anger.

"Sleep? Ha! You think I can sleep knowing that Harry isn't safe?" Slowly her anger turned to mental exhaustion, and she ended lamely. "Just go away Anna, leave me alone.."

Anna sighed, again her attempts to cheer her sister up being defeated. "Alright. But you need to eat, Hermione. No, Listen. If not for yourself then for the baby. There's two of you to think about now."

Hermione looked taken aback for a moment. In her despair she had put being pregnant out of her mind. She opened her mouth to speak but before the words left her mouth Anna had dissapeared out the door, and once again she was alone. Now, having recieved what she had asked for, she regretted sending Anna away so abruptly. Her presence was comforting, if even only a little bit so. She felt bad for taking her frustrations out on her sister, but she was so distraught that she could not think straight. It had been the same when she was taken to Number 12, Grimwauld place by Dumbledore himself...

...It had been close to 1am when Hermione and her parents, escorted by Dumbledore, had apparaeted into her living room. Hurried footfall came towards the living room door and Anna burst in and stopped abruptly in surprise. She had never had the pleasure of meeting Albus Dumbledore before, and on first appearances, she thought he was strange and off putting. His bizarre appearance had wiped her mind of everything she was about to say and she struggled to get her bearings as she stared at him rudely. She desperately hoped that this man was a wizard, for if not, he definitely wasn't the kind of man she wanted to be associating with her parents, they were embarrassing enough on their own without some weirdo's help.

His midnight blue robes were showered in small silver stars and his long silver beard hung down passed his naval. Despite having a witch for a sister, she had never seen any other wizards dressed the way he was, but she had no other explaination for him. She was sure from his appearance that he was not entirely right in the head. He smiled weakly to her and his bright eyes shimmered behind his half moon spectacles. Anna shook off her shock and ignored the man for the present time.

"I was getting worried, where have you been..." She began, but her words trailed off in horror seeing that all four of them were covered in what appeared to be blood. "What's going on? Who's blood is that..."

Before the question had entirely left her mouth Hermione had turned on her heel and fled up the staircase to her room. Anna had caught a glimpse of her tear stained face and the hollow yet determined look in her eyes.

"Dad?" she probed again anxiously, upon receiving no answer.

"Something has happened to Harry.." He said quietly.

"What did you do?.." she asked in shock.

"I didn't do anything."

She had expected his answer to bite back at her, but it was calm and solemn, this alone told her that something was not right.

"He wasn't there when we arrived. His uncle had been torturing him, his magic somehow took over and I don't know.. but he's not there. No one knows where he is." He continued quietly.

"Tortured?" Anna choked out in alarm. "What do you mean tortured?"

"You must be Hermione's older sister, Anna, am I correct?" Dumbledore interrupted gently.

"Who are you?" she replied a little more rudely than she had intended.

"Albus Dumbledore, I am the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." Dumbledore replied curteously.

"Why are you here? What's going on? Dad?" She said turning her attention again to her father.

"Hermione summoned me from Harry's Uncles' house as soon as she discovered the scene." Dumbledore interjected once more, "I'm afraid she is very distraught. It wasn't a pleasant sight."

Jonathan looked at up at Dumbledore in surprise. "Wasn't a pleasant sight? That's all you can say, after what we just witnessed? If the boy's not dead it will be a miracle!"

"John, I'm sure professor Dumbledore didn't mean.." Anna's mother interjected.

"No, I'm sure he didn't." John said shortly, cutting her off. Sarcasm was eminent in his voice.

"Dead?" Anna repeated in alarm. "You don't really think that he could be dead? Was it that bad?" Anna asked in shock.

"What do you think Anna?" He snapped, losing his patience. "I'm standing here covered in the blood of a boy I hardly know. I can still smell his room, the smell of rotting flesh. If he's not dead yet, wherever he is, he'll be wishing that he was. No one could sustain that amount of injury for long without being treated."

Dumbledore cleared his throat loudly.

"Let's face it, It's highly possible that the boy is dead." John continued, ignoring the old wizard.

Dumbledore cleared his throat louder still, and John turned swiftly to tell him to shut up, only to see his youngest daughter paused on the bottom step of the staircase, glaring at him angrily. Furious tears burned at her eyes and she blinked rapidly.

"Hermione sweetheart.." He began, only to be cut off.

"Don't waste your breath dad. You may have given up on him already, but I assure you I havn't. He's alive, I know it, and i'm not going to sit here and wait for a miracle. I'm going to look for him."

"Hermione its One O'clock in the morning." Her father protested.

"You saw his room." She said through her tears, "You know we don't have any time to waste, I don't care if you aren't coming, I planned to go alone anyway."

"I'm afraid I can't allow that Miss Granger." Dumbledore broke the silence.

"Oh? And who said that you have the right to presume authority over me? This is your fault, all of this, and if you won't fix your mistakes then I will." She snapped.

"I can't allow that," He continued ignoring her outburst, "Because I need you to come with me to the Order's Headquarters immediately. I need them to start looking for Harry as soon as possible, and, as you witnessed the ward's collapsing, and were first on the scene, you need to fill in some minor details for the aurors'."

Hermione turned slightly pink.

"Don't make the mistake of thinking that I don't regret very deeply what has happened to Harry as a result of my interfering. I want Harry found just as much as you do." Dumbledore added, narrowing his eyes behind his half moon spectacles.

Hermione nodded quietly and moved over to him, "Please, can we check the hospitals first? Just quickly, I need to know if he's made it to safety." she pleaded.

Dumbledore frowned heavily, then conceded seeing the look on her face. "Very well, but very quickly mind you. I doubt highly that he will be in any hospital and the Order need to be informed of the situation as soon as possible so that work may begin on his recovery."

Hermione nodded, slightly relieved. "I know, I'll feel better knowing the Order are looking for him, but I need to do this first. It's important...". Hermione despised herself for playing nice with Dumbledore, but she knew it was imperative to getting Harry back as soon as possible. She decided to give the old man the benefit of the doubt one last time, for as she looked at him, he appeared frail and genuinely distressed by what had happened to Harry when he was supposed to be protecting him.

Dumbledore nodded briefly. "Mr and Mrs Granger, I'll keep Hermione with me for a few days, so she can help with the investigation. We will

need to return to question you also about what you saw, just so we can verify details, that sort of thing.."

Mr Granger nodded curtly and walked over to Hermione, placing his hands on her shoulders and looking into her eyes which mirrored his own. "Be careful, and if you need us, write."

She nodded biting her lip as he reached down and hugged her tightly. "Everything will be ok, Hermione." He added, "I promise.."

When he released her her mother moved in for a quick embrace and a kiss on the cheek before Dumbledore took her by the hand and they both dissapeared with a crack. Anna barely had time to wave before they dissapeared from sight.

Arriving outside the headquarters an hour later, Hermione felt suddenly hopeless. The search of the hospital's in the area had proved fruitless, as Dumbledore had suggested it might. Still, Hermione was very distressed to discover that Harry was not in the safe hands of healers, and began to panic, having not found him so easily.

"He could be anywhere.." she said in despair, suddenly the vastness of "anywhere" hit her like a ton of bricks.

"Don't worry Hermione, like I said, the sooner we get the Order on the case, the better." Dumbledore had replied as they appeared in the dark lane lit only by dim streetlamps.

Hermione recognised Grimwauld Place immediately, and Number 12 loomed before her ominously as she looked to her right. Somehow it seemed darker and more dreary than ever before, and the fact that Sirius was now dead made it appear very morbid indeed. The crescent moon shone down on the rooftop, making it glisten against the darkness.

"Quickly." He urged her, as he steered her toward the front door. "It's not safe to linger here."

His knuckles were rapping urgently on the wooden door even before his feet touched the doorstep. From within Hermione heard footsteps approach the door, then a muffled voice called out, "Who is it?"

The voice belonged to Molly Weasley.

"Molly, Its Albus. Let me in, quickly." He spoke hastily.

The locks on the other side of the door clicked and the door swung open, Dumbledore wasted no time in pushing Hermione hastily inside and shutting it behind him in under a second. As the locks clicked once more, Mrs Weasley looked at Hermione in surprise.

"Hermione? Why Albus, what is she doing here?" She asked in surprise.

"I will explain in due time Molly, let us move into the living room, It's awfully draughty in this hallway." he said impatiently.

Molly nodded in agreement and lead the way to the living area. Hermione looked about and realised that nothing about the house had changed dramatically since Sirius' departure. She wondered if they had not had the heart to change the house's appearance, despite Sirius' loathing for the place. As they entered the living room the bright light stung Hermione's eyes. Mrs Weasley turned around and faced them.

"Would you like some tea?" She asked with a smile, but her smile faded rapidly into a look of horror and she let out a small scream.

"Calm yourself Molly whatever is the matter?" Dumbledore asked in surprise.

She lifted a shaky finger and pointed to their clothing. "Blood.. Whose blood is that? What on earth happened?"

"Ah," Dumbledore said apologetically. "I'm sorry, i forgot. I'm afraid that will take a bit of explaining, but I would like the entire Order present for that story, Molly. No exceptions. This is extremely urgent."

She nodded her pale face and dissapeared into the kitchen to summon the remaining members of the Order of the Pheonix. Dumbledore turned to Hermione and gave her a small smile.

"Hermione, why don't you go and clean up?" He suggested gently, his wise eyes twinkling softly in the light. "Let me inform the order of the backstory, you're exhausted and I can do the job well enough on my own. I will call for you when they need your version of events."

"No, I want to be there." She said in a shaky voice. "I want to help.."

"And you will, Hermione." He said with a kind smile, placing a hand on her shoulder. "You're still in shock, you need to sit down for a while. And besides, I think, if my guess is correct, that you will find Mr. Weasley upstairs on the second floor, and I think it would be best if he heard the news from you, Don't you agree?"

Hermione felt a jolt of relief in her stomach. Ron was here. She nodded quietly, still not happy about being left out of the meeting, but admitted defeat, realising she was covered in blood and completely drained of all energy. Ron would be pleased to see her at any rate, until she gave him her account of what they had found at Harry's house. She didn't want to be the one to admit that it was real. She was still waiting for someone to tell her that it was ok, that it had all been a horrible dream.

She stood outside the door to Ron's bedroom for several minutes, eyes closed, picturing how she would tell him that Harry could be dead. At last her hand obeyed her instructions and she found herself knocking on the creaky wooden door. She heard the familiar grunt that she had come to recognize as Ron's version of "Come In". She turned the doorknob as if in a dream to see Ron lying on his stomach lengthways on his bed, reading a chudley cannon's book. As the miniature quidditch players zoomed across the cover Hermione thought of Harry, and wondered if he would ever play as seeker again.

Ron looked up and his mouth opened in surprise. "Hermione! When did you get here? Thank God, i've been bored out of my mind. Now all we need is for Dumbledore to let Harry come and we're set." Ron paused suddenly and screwed his eyes up, looking at her more

closely, as though he thought he had seen something that he assumed would disappear on second glance; only it didn't.

"Hello, Ron.." She said quietly, fresh tears begining to roll down her face.

"Hermione.." he said in concern, "What's happened?"

She couldn't explain why seeing Ron's face had made her finally break down in despair, and as he moved forward and lead her over to sit down on his bed her tears fell thick and fast.

"Hermione, where have you been? You're covered in blood.." he said quietly.

"It was horrible, Ron." she choked out through her sobs, "There was so much blood, and I'm scared because I don't know where he is.."

"Hermione, You're not making sense.. calm down." He said soothingly as she latched onto him, crying into his shoulder. The dull aching in her chest throbbed painfully as she cried loudly, "Breathe, Hermione, just breathe.. that's it.."

Her sobs quietened for a moment and he pulled her back to look her in the eye. "Now, tell me what's happened. You don't know where who is?"

"Harry." she said gulping some air. "He's gone.."

"What?" Ron asked in shock. "What do you mean 'he's gone', Hermione?"

"I went to his Uncle's house.. I was worried about him.. When I got there, there was a huge explosion of magic.. the anti porkey wards and anti apparition wards collapsed and when I got to Harry's room.. He wasn't there Ron.." she choked.

Ron laughed as though she was over reacting. "Hermione, don't you see? If he wasn't there, then what are you worried about? He'd probably just had enough of Dudley and took off. He'll be fine, he was probably nowhere near the explosion. You worry too much, you even

had me worrying there for a minute. I bet that he turns up here or the Burrow within the next day, arrogantly refusing to apologise to Dumbledore for running away from his bloody awful relatives."

"No Ron, you don't understand.." she began, not knowing how to describe what she had witnessed in Harry's room. "This blood.. this blood is Harry's.."

Ron stared at her in disbelief. "I thought you said he wasn't there?"

"He wasn't.. I ran into his room.. The blood was everywhere.. On his bed, the floor, the walls.. The smell Ron.. It was unbearable.." Hermione said, tears streaking down her face silently.

*"I don't understand.." Ron said shaking his head as if he didn't believe what she was saying.
"What happened?"*

"His uncle, Ron." She said in a hollow voice. "He's been beating him all summer.. Torturing him.. His aunt.. she told me that his uncle burnt his eyes out with acid.. broke his legs.. whipped him..."

Ron stared at her in shock. "No.. No Harry wouldn't let him do that.. His uncle's scared of him remember.. the whole magic thing.. It's not possible.. Harry would have jinxed him with every curse under the sun.."

"Dumbledore bound his magic at the end of last term.." Hermione said quietly, the vast emptiness in her chest devouring her. "He was writing us letter's to tell us when his uncle confiscated them.. That's how he found out.. That's when it started."

"No.. That's not possible.. Why would Dumbledore do that? Harry's magic is the only defense he has.." Ron said in silent rage.

"It also links him to Voldemort, Dumbledore said he thought he was protecting Harry by binding it.." Hermione explained.

"Fat lot of good that did, He didn't even manage to protect him from his own flesh and blood. What the hell was he thinking?" Ron

shouted violently, throwing his book forcefully into the bookshelf at the end of his room, smashing a glass vase into pieces.

Hermione jumped and Ron immediately regretted his actions, running his hands through his hair in frustration. He cursed, making an angry, helpless noise as he rubbed in his temples, trying to think. He took a deep breath and turned to face Hermione once more.

"What's being done to recover him?" He asked calmly.

"Dumbledore is informing the Order of what took place now. I have to go and tell them my side of the story soon. We don't know what's happened Ron, he can't have escaped on his own he wasn't capable of it.. Dumbledore thinks his magic broke free to try and heal him and maybe apparated him away or maybe he came in contact with a portkey.. but no one knows for sure.. We checked St Mungos and several muggle hospitals, he's nowhere to be found. We don't have any idea where he is or how he got there.."

Ron sat down heavily, clutching his head in anger. "This should never have happened.. We should have written to him.. Why do we always listen to that stupid old git?"

"Ron.. What if.. What if Harry's.." Hermione choked.

"Hermione, Harry is going to be fine. We will find him, You know we will.." Ron said looking at her in surprise, he had not expected her to give up on him so easily.

"You didn't see it Ron.." she said shaking her head.

There was a sharp knock on the door, which caused both Hermione and Ron to jump and as it opened it revealed Mrs Weasley. Her face was drawn and pale and her eyes red and agitated.

"Hermione," She said quietly. "It's time."

Hermione got to her feet, followed almost instantly by Ron, but Mrs Weasley interjected. "Ron, Hermione needs to face them alone. You can see her afterwards."

"But Mom.."

"No but's Ron! Just listen for once in your life!" she snapped and disappeared from the room with a sob.

Ron punched the wall in frustration, roaring to vent his anger. Throwing himself down on his bed he looked at Hermione, the tears still clinging to her eyes. He gave her a bracing look, a half smile to let her know he was ok. Hermione frowned, shooting Ron an apologetic look, then without a word trailed after his mother down the creaky staircase..

"Hermione.." Remus said catching his first glimpse of her as she walked into the living room once more. He looked pale and alarmed as he walked up to her, taking her in his arms and hugging her gently. After a moment, he steered her toward an armchair in the living room and made her sit, pressing a glass of amber liquid into her hand. "Here, drink this. It'll make you feel better."

"No, thank you, I'm not thirsty.." she said, politely smiling as she tried to hand it back.

"Hermione, drink, you really don't look well. Trust me, it'll help.." He pressed, refusing to take it back.

"I don't want to feel better." She said shortly, "I want to find Harry."

"Drink up Hermione, the sooner you do the sooner we can get started." Dumbledore said sternly.

Hermione resented being treated like a five year old, but decided if it was the fastest way to move this along that she would appease them. "Fine.." She groaned.

She put the glass to her lips and tilted it, but then suddenly stopped, pulling it away from her lips. Every eye in the room was watching her eagerly, too eagerly.. Suddenly a thought clicked into place in her mind which made her stomach lurch and her heart beat rapidly.

"Veritaserum." She said in disbelief, looking around at the guilt ridden faces in the room Her stomach felt like lead as her face slackened in

horror. "You think i had something to do with his disappearance, don't you?"

There was an extremely awkward silence, as everyone in the room moved shiftily and glanced carefully from one to the other.

"You were outside Harry's house at the exact moment the ward's collapsed, and according to you, you were the first on the scene. We suspect you know more than you are letting on, yes." Alastor Moody spoke up, His electric blue eye fixed on her intently.

"I don't believe this.. Dumbledore, you said that only Harry's magic could have caused the ward's to collapse." She said, rounding on him with an accusing tone.

"That is true, but there is a small possibility that an outside force could have done so, a very small chance, but we have to investigate all avenues. Even if it were Harry's magic that destroyed the wards, It still does not explain how he managed to disappear.. And seeing as you were there at the time of the wards collapsing, we have to ask you a few questions." Dumbledore said, his eyes narrowing on her.

"I told you! I was worried about him, I hadn't seen nor heard from him in weeks! I needed to make sure he was alright!" she yelled in frustration.

"It's a very fortunate coincidence, don't you think?" Dumbledore said darkly.

Hermione's mouth was open in horror. "Fortunate? How could you even think that I would have something to do with this? He's my best friend!"

"We've seen it happen before." Lupin said darkly. "You wouldn't be the first to sell your best friend out to the dark lord."

Hermione's face went violently red. Her whole body was vibrating with silent anger, this had been the last thing that she was expecting. Dumbledore had managed to pull the wool over her eyes yet again, and she cursed herself for giving him the opportunity to manipulate her for his own purposes. She looked at him then, a glare filled with

hatred and loathing, yet he merely smiled in return, his beady eyes twinkling back at her as if this were all very amusing.

"This was your plan all along. You humored me to get me here. How dare you!" She screamed. "I thought you were sorry! I thought you were sorry for what you had done to him! Now I see that it was all an act because you think that I've sold him off! I don't believe this.. Harry is lying somewhere dying, God knows where, and you're sitting here, questioning me, rather than looking for him? You make me sick! I would never ever sell Harry out. Ever!"

"Well, if you havn't then it won't be a problem for you to tell us what happened then, will it?" Moody said grimly, eyeing her suspiciously.

"We don't have time for this!" Hermione shouted furiously.

"The sooner you tell us the truth, the sooner we can find him.." Lupin said quietly.

"Perhaps you found him, lying there in all that blood, calling out in agony and you wanted to ease his pain. We wouldn't blame you, he must have been going through hell.." Tonks suggested kindly, that fact that she was trying to coax a confession out of her was not lost on Hermione.

"How dare you.." Hermione said through gritted teeth as she looked up at Tonks in disgust. "I would never kill him.. I would never kill anyone.."

"All that blood.." Shacklebolt said in a drilling voice, "His injuries must have been substantial, broken legs, eyes burnt out.. It must have been a terrible sight.. No one would want their best friend to go through that.."

"I didn't kill him!" Hermione screamed.

"Maybe he asked for it? Maybe he begged and pleaded you to finish it.. To put him out of his misery?" Lupin said raising his voice. "And who could refuse the voice of a friend in pain?"

"I did not kill Harry!" She shouted rising from her chair.

"You're covered in his blood.." Tonks pointed out.

Hermione's jaw dropped in surprise. "You can't be serious? His room was covered in blood.. There's no way you can pin that on me.. Dumbledore is covered in his blood too!"

"Dumbledore has witnesses to prove how that blood got there. You, on the other hand, were alone when your parents found you covered in it, funny that, isn't it?" Tonks said with a cold stare.

Hermione fell back into her chair weakly, trying to figure out how she had got herself to this place in time.

"Tell us what happened." Lupin said shortly.

"Why were you really outside Harry's bedroom at 9.30pm?" Moody growled...

Fresh tears stung the corners of Hermione's eyes as the pain of the memory resurfaced. The Order of the Pheonix believed that she had betrayed Harry, her best friend, the father of her child. For three days they had kept her there, repeating the same questions over and over, drilling her, hoping to make her crack and confess. This betrayal was more severe to her than Dumbledore's dealings with her. She had held the upmost respect for the Order as a collective, and their accusations had cut her deeper than she would ever let on. Dumbledore had returned her home on the fourth day, and she had been sitting in this same spot ever since.

Darkness had now fallen completely outside and the warm orange glow of the streetlamp seemed brighter than before. Through her open window Hermione heard the wind start with an ominous howl. The window rattled against its force and spots of rain began to splatter against the glass pane. She sighed heavily and stood, walking over to the table where her food tray sat, and picked at its contents wearily.

The tree outside swayed in and out of the path of the streetlamp, casting shadows across her room that danced mournfully. The leaves chattered noisily in the wind, which seemed only to increase her despair as those tears that had been threatening to spill over finally

did so. She leaned against the wall and slid down it in slow motion, weak and scared. She cried, hard and long, choking out Harry's name over and over as if he might reply if she could only say it clear enough. Her head hung between her knees and her salty tears pooled onto the floor beneath her. She could not escape the plaguing thoughts of Harry's bloodied room, or the sight of his dead body that she had now conjured up perfectly in her imagination. It utterly broke her, over and over and over again.

She didn't hear the fluttering of wings over her deafening thoughts. Nor did she hear the clattering of sharp talons as the scrawny, snow white owl landed on her writing desk. It was not until Hegwig had flown over and pecked her sharply on the finger that Hermione even realized that she had arrived.

"Hedwig?" she said in surprise, wiping her eyes temporarily to look at the owl closely. "Where have you been? You never came back after I sent you to find Dumbledore.."

Hedwig hooted impatiently and stuck out her leg, revealing a tightly rolled scroll tied with a red string.

"Alright girl, alright.." Hermione said soothingly as she hastily removed it, and unrolled it carefully.

She was surprised to find that the handwriting on the outside of the parchment was completely foreign to her.

"Where have you been girl?" Hermione asked curiously. "Who sent you?"

Hedwig nipped her finger impatiently again and hooted doefully.

Hermione examined the parchment carefully, her curiosity increasing. It was written in an elegant hand, that of a woman, but other than that it held no clues for her. The curly sloping letter's that served as the address for Hedwig merely formed one word, and one word alone. 'Hermione'...

Chapter Six: I Spoke Into Her Eyes, I Thought You Died Alone..

Intrigued, Hermione unraveled the parchment. The thick yellow paper was reluctant to unfurl, so Hermione stretched it out between her hands firmly. The same delicate handwriting that had graced the outside of the parchment filled the inside with a lengthy yet urgent note. Her eyes skimmed the neatly written lines eagerly, and after a few lines her eyes widened in surprise. After several more, her mouth was hanging open, and her heart was racing.

Hermione,

We have never met, and I am not even sure if this letter will reach you, as I have no idea where you are, or even who you are. Perhaps I should explain, as I am sure you must think me insane. Seven days ago, a young boy appeared in my living room, I assume by apparition. I do not know how he came to us, or why, I confess I do not even know who he is. He is badly beaten, and I fear that even if I did know him I would not be able to recognize him. I am a healer and I assure you I am doing everything within my power to heal his wounds, but they are vast and extensive. The young man in question fades between unconsciousness and semi consciousness as his body tries to heal, and I must admit that I am concerned as to whether he will recover.

As for why I am contacting you, and how I have come to know of you. As he stirs he mumbles, and the only word that makes any sense from him is your name, Hermione. We found a letter in his pocket that he had obviously intended for you, but he had not addressed it, nor been able to finish it, for it is not signed. Therefore, I am placing all my faith in this owl, which showed up at my window three days ago and has refused to leave the boy's side since I let it in. I am assuming that the owl belongs to this young man, and I sincerely hope that it knows how to reach you, for I do not know what else to do. I need to meet with you, I think perhaps it would be a good idea if you saw him, as I do not know how long he will last.

If, I am hoping, this letter reaches you, and you know of whom I speak, then I implore you, meet me at the table closest to the bar of the Sunset Inn at 7pm tomorrow night. (Directions enclosed). I know

this seems odd, but incase this letter is intercepted, I would prefer it if we met in a public location, for I fear that the boy may have deadly enemies. From there, when I am sure it is safe, I will take you to the boy, who is recovering at my own home. I only hope this reaches you in time. Until our meeting, rest assured that your friend is in good hands.

I leave you in faith.

Hermione's heart leapt wildly. *Harry was alive*. In bad shape, very bad shape it seemed, yet alive. The woman had stated she was a Healer and that she was doing everything within her power to save him. A tiny sliver of hope shimmered out from Hermione's stomach and loosened the knots that had been in place ever since she had entered Harry's room. Frozen in shock she clutched the letter tightly in her hand, the knuckles of her fingers turning white. The thoughts in her mind spinning dangerously.

Send word to Dumbledore.. Hermione's naïve old self immediately urged her.

No. Her conscience fought with itself. He can't be trusted. He's betrayed us far too many times.

This time will be different.. It was all a misunderstanding..

It will never be different. He knows exactly what he's doing. There are no misunderstandings..

You need to tell someone.. It might not be safe..

I'm going whether it's safe or not. Harry needs me.

He doesn't need you captured or dead..

I won't let that happen.

You could be walking into a trap..

That's a risk I'll have to take.

You shouldn't take it alone.. Tell someone..

Who?

Someone you can trust..

"Anna.." Hermione mumbled subconsciously.

"Yes?" Came her voice from the opposite side of her bedroom door ten minutes later as Hermione stood outside, having just called her name.

"Can I come in?" Hermione asked.

"Unless you want to stand out there and shout at me through the door all night I suggest you do." Anna said, Hermione could hear the grin in her voice.

Hermione clicked open the door to find Anna lying on her bed reading the latest issue of the Rolling Stone magazine. Without looking up for a second she continued in a bored voice. "Besides, I thought you lot could see through walls and stuff."

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "Not the last time I checked."

"Oh." She replied with minimal interest.

"At least not all the time. And only then if you recite the correct incantation first.." Hermione proceeded then promptly cut herself off. "I need to show you something.."

Anna's eyes left the pages of her magazine and looked up at her with eager inquisition. "What?"

"First, you have to promise you won't say a word to mum and dad.." She said anxiously.

"What is it?" Anna repeated firmly.

"Promise." Hermione said stubbornly with an air of urgency.

"Alright Alright, now what is it?" Anna said impatiently.

Hermione looked at Anna carefully as if weighing up her viability before she reached into her pocket and pulled out the old parchment with the curly writing. "This arrived for me about ten minutes ago, by Harry's owl.."

Anna gasped in surprise. "Harry's owl? He's alright?"

"Just.. Read it." Hermione said impatiently, thrusting the letter at her sister.

Anna took the parchment carefully and unrolled it, reading over the words that Hermione had read not long ago. Her eyes grew wide, her mouth opened, and she paled in horror, just as Hermione had done. When at last she finished reading, she rolled the parchment up carefully and handed it back to Hermione.

"It's not signed.." Anna said quietly.

"I know. But you can understand why. If it was intercepted Harry wouldn't have a hope." Hermione argued in the letter writer's defense.

"Hermione.. The letter doesn't say anything about the fact that it's Harry they've got. They don't know it's him. How could anyone else ever interpret that letter as saying, 'I've got Harry Potter'. I don't think there was any reason why they couldn't sign their name. I don't like this.."

"She said it herself Anna," Hermione said growing a little angry. "I fear that the boy may have deadly enemies"

"Hermione, don't be so quick to trust this person, It could be a trap." Anna reasoned.

"She wants to meet me in public. How could she do anything to me in public?"

"What if she's just trying to gain your trust before taking you off somewhere? And for that matter how do you know that it's a woman?" Anna said in concern.

"It's a woman's writing." Hermione stated defensively.

"That doesn't mean anything Hermione." Anna scolded.

"Anna, I'm going to meet her." Hermione said angrily. "I have too, you read it, she doesn't know how long he'll last.."

"That's if she's telling the truth, Hermione." Anna said skeptically.

"Why would somebody lie about that?" Hermione asked in disgust.

"I don't know, maybe to draw you out on purpose, knowing that you would respond no matter what. You told me Voldemort is still at large, don't you think you should be careful?" Anna replied sternly.

Hermione shrugged. "Come with me then."

"What?" Anna asked in alarm.

"If you're so worried about me, come with me." Hermione said folding her arms.

"Hermione I don't even think you should be going. Besides, what help will I be if you're attacked?" Anna said with a hard stare that Hermione guessed the meaning of.

"I'm not going to Dumbledore."

"What about.."

"Or the Order."

"Hermione you can't go alone.."

"Anna they think I had a hand in his disappearance, how incriminating is it going to look if I show up with a letter from a complete stranger whose owl just happened to find me on name alone basis?" It was Hermione's turn to show her intelligence.

Anna was unable to think of a reply and admitted defeat. "Then you need to tell Mum and Dad."

Hermione sighed in frustration. "How did I know you were going to say that?"

"I'm serious Hermione."

"What good will it do telling mum and dad? You know exactly what they'll do. Dad will go off his nut with conspiracy theories and mum will say "Oh dear, this is a strange business..."" Hermione mocked in annoyance.

Anna couldn't help but grin, but quickly tried to mask it. "They at least should go with you."

Hermione made a noise of displeasure. "Must they?" she asked wearily.

"You need to tell them." Anna said firmly, not backing down. "If you don't I will."

"You promised me you wouldn't tell them." Hermione retorted.

"Yes, but you tricked me. And you have no grounds for hiding it from them. Don't you think they'll notice when you disappear? I'll be interrogated and grounded within seconds." Anna said getting to her feet.

"Anna.." Hermione said pleadingly, "Harry needs me.."

Anna frowned looking at her exhausted sister's pleading eyes. She had seen them many times before and had always given into them. Hermione knew it was working, she could see the weakening in Anna's eyes. She knew that her sister would pull through for her, as always.

"Alright, alright. I won't tell them.." She said in defeat.

"Thank you Anna." Hermione said in relief, flinging herself at her sister and hugging her in gratitude.

"OK, that's enough." Anna said with a distressed laugh.

Hermione didn't see it, but her eyes gave a flicker of regret.

"How will you go?" Anna asked quietly.

"It's going to be difficult. I'm pretty sure the Order have people watching me. I'll walk to the outskirts of town, then apparate. Don't tell anyone, but I was practicing at school all of last term. I've become fairly good at it too.." Hermione said with a mischievous smile.

"I thought you weren't allowed until you have a license?" Anna asked in surprise.

Hermione shrugged innocently. "It was all research."

Anna gave her a look of awe. "You're more like me than I ever could have hoped for."

"What can I say? You've rubbed off on me." Hermione said absently.

"Please, Hermione.." Anna said in concern. "Be careful won't you? I have a bad feeling about this."

"I'll be fine." Hermione assured her. "I can take care of myself."

Truth be known, she was more concerned for Harry than she was for herself, and Anna knew it. She frowned. Hermione wasn't thinking rationally about any of this. Anna was sure that if Voldemort himself had come forward and said "I have Harry", Hermione would have taken him on alone. Anna knew what she had to do. She would not lose her sister to rash thinking. She would not let Hermione walk into a trap all alone..

Anna frowned. "You should get some sleep.. It's late."

Hermione gave her a weak smile. "You're right. The sooner I sleep the sooner seven o'clock will come. I just hope Harry is alright.."

"The letter says he's alive, Hermione. Everything will be OK."

"I hope you're right.." Hermione said looking worried again.

"Get some sleep. We can talk in the morning." Anna said quietly, giving her a half smile.

Hermione nodded, gave her sister a grateful glance, then disappeared, closing the door behind her. Anna went swiftly to the door, holding her breath as she listened over her heartbeat to the noise of Hermione's retreating footsteps. When they fell silent and Hermione's door closed, Anna quietly opened her own door and slipped out onto the landing. Tip toeing across the carpeted floorboards, avoiding all the creaky ones, she made it to the stairs. She stole down the steps silently and listened for her parent's voices. She could hear them in the dining room.

Carefully she swept towards the half open door and opened it as she entered, shutting it completely behind herself. Her mother and father were sitting deep in discussion, drinking tea from white china cups. Anna, who had entered unnoticed, cleared her throat to alert them of her presence. Her father looked up in surprise and his face grew alarmed seeing the urgency in her stance.

"What is it, Anna?" He asked curiously.

Anna moved hastily toward the table around which they sat and pulled up a chair, looking at them gravely.

"I need to tell you something.."

The next morning found a very disgruntled looking Hermione sitting across the table from a very guilty looking Anna, Who was in turn sitting next to very stubborn and angry looking parents.

"We're coming with you." Hermione's father stated in a 'that's final' tone.

They had been arguing for hours, since Nine o'clock when Hermione had awoken for breakfast and was immediately marched into the dining room for a family conference. It was now One o'clock in the afternoon. She loathed family conferences. They had never held the promise of anything Hermione wished to discuss, and she knew that there would be nothing different about this morning's attempt. When

she entered to see Anna's face, she knew exactly what was being called into question.

"Why would you try to hide something like this from us Hermione?" Her mother asked again in a hurt tone, "We want to find Harry as much as you do."

"I thought you would try to contact Dumbledore and let him sort it out. You don't understand Mum, He'd turn this all around on me. I need to do this alone." Hermione repeated again, rubbing her forehead wearily.

"And so you will." Her father chirped up, "Alone with us."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Fine. But I'm doing the talking. You'll scare her away before she gets a word in."

Her father looked at her indignantly as if she was fabricating a huge lie about his personality.

"I resent that." He said in an outraged voice.

"More like resemble.." Anna muttered under her breath.

"Watch it you." Jonathan threatened his oldest daughter menacingly.
"Anyway, we'll drive."

"Dad.. " Hermione began.

"No." He cut her off without waiting for what she would suggest.

"The Sunset Inn is on the other side of the country.." She continued in spite.

"It's.. What?" He asked in surprise.

"That's why I was going to Apparate.." Hermione continued.

"But.."

"I think I can apparate us all.." Hermione said, visibly thinking. "I am pretty good at it now.."

"Oh.. well, good. That's settled then." He said abruptly.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Yes Dad, brilliant plan, I'm so glad you thought of it."

Jonathan's presence suddenly grew menacing again, which Hermione took as a signal to leave the Dining room at last and return to her room, awaiting six thirty. She had figured it all out. Leave the house at six thirty. Walk for twenty minutes until they hit the outskirts of town. Apparate to the back alley of the Inn that the author of the letter had suggested. Enter the Sunset Inn, and wait in the bar for Harry's healer to appear. It was perfect. If only her parents would not mess it up, for somehow, she knew that they would.

As she climbed the staircase to her room she was lost in thought. Knowing Harry was alive had come as a huge relief. But, at the same time, the thought that he was slipping between unconsciousness and subconsciousness, mumbling incoherently in unbearable pain, made her very uneasy and very, very anxious. The father of her child, her best friend in the whole world, was lying somewhere, near death, in the hands of a complete stranger. The thought did not ease her mind. The sooner seven o'clock arrived, the better.

As she reached her room she shut the door behind her with a soft click, and sat down lightly on the edge of her bed, flicking her legs up as she lay back, staring at the ceiling. Her eyes flicked to the clock after a few moments, reading the time as 1.13pm. After about thirty minutes she threw the clock across the room, where it shattered as it hit the wall. Time seemed to drag so painfully it was almost unbearable. Her chest grew tight with frustration, anxiety and despair. She had begun to get fidgety and uneasy.

Come on.. Come on.. She thought as she tapped her heel against the bed furiously.

The sound in her room was deafening. The broken clock still ticked on from the floor, steadily growing louder and louder. A fly had come in her open window and proceeded to buzz around her room in circles. A bird outside her window began chirping rhythmically and Hermione felt her eyebrow begin to twitch in irritation. How long would she have to sit here, not knowing if Harry was dying, just

waiting.. waiting for a meeting that would determine the outcome of the rest of her life.

Crying out in frustration she flipped herself onto her stomach ungracefully and slammed the pillow over her head, blocking out the irritating noises that now were driving her crazy.

Please.. Just let it be Six Thirty.. Let it be Six Thirty.. let it be Six Thirty.. Let him be alright..

As the time dragged by, the heat of the day faded, and Hermione felt her lack of sleep catch her unawares. The warmth and comfort of her bed made her eyes droop hazily. Suddenly her eyes shot open and she sat bolt upright, her head snapping around to look at the broken clock lying on the floor.

Six Fifty Seven..

Hermione blinked rapidly, rubbing her eyes furiously as she looked again.

Six Fifty Seven..

"Shit.." She said frantically as she jumped to her feet and tore down the staircase, "Mum! Dad!"

"Where's the fire?" Her father asked in a voice that did nothing but piss her off.

"We're late! Hurry up! We have to go!" She screeched impatiently as she reached the bottom of the stairs.

"I thought you said this "Apparating" was Instantaneous?" Her father demanded of her in confusion.

"It is! But we weren't supposed to apparate from here!" She said in despair.

"Well why didn't you bloody say so?" Her father yelled angrily, grabbing his coat and yelling for his wife. "Where are we going first?"

"It's too late now we're going to have too apparate from here!" she barked impatiently.

Hermione's mother rushed into the room, slinging her coat around her shoulders. "Ready Dear." She said to Hermione breathlessly.

"Finally" Hermione said in frustration. "Come here!" She said as she forcefully grabbed them by a wrist each.

Then, with a loud Crack, they were gone.

A loud crack echoed through the alley behind the Sunset Inn and Mr. and Mrs. Granger fell over in alarm after experiencing their first apparation.

"I think I'm going to be sick.." Mrs. Granger said wearily.

"Definitely prefer driving.. You're kind have got it all wrong.." Her father said weakly, trying to sound masculine.

"Come on!" She snapped impatiently, pulling her father to his feet.
"What's the time?"

Checking his watch he replied, "Five past Seven."

"Shit!" Hermione cursed. "Come on!"

She did not wait for them to follow as she tore around the side alley heading for the entrance of the Inn.

Please still be here.. Please still be here..

The large golden Sun that swung from the doorway told her that they had come to the right place as she pushed the door open hastily and strode into the scarcely populated room. She stopped after a few paces, hearing her parents rush through the door several seconds later, puffing heavily. Hermione scanned the room frantically, left to right, looking for the lone figure that was to meet her here. She moved forward slowly, looking at the scattered faces individually who were all treating her as if she were insane. Hermione's heart pounded frantically.

She left.. She didn't think I was coming..

Then, as if out of thin air, Hermione saw a slim hooded figure sitting alone at the table closest to the bar. As she had stated she would be, there she was. Hermione's breath caught in her chest, and she numbly moved towards the figure, who hadn't seemed to notice her presence. When at last she reached the table where the woman sat, Hermione pulled out the opposite chair and sat down, breathing heavily. The hooded figure looked up and a pair of green eyes shone out of the shadow cast by the material. The woman studied her for several moments, which felt like a lifetime to Hermione, and then she spoke.

"And you are?"

"Hermione Granger.." Hermione stated uncertainly.

She noticed that her parents had hung back around the bar, very wise in her opinion.

"I'm glad you could make it." The woman said quietly. "Who are they?" She asked, motioning to her mother and father.

"My parents. They didn't want me to come alone.." Hermione said a slight hint of concern in her voice, she hoped that this did not upset the woman.

She merely nodded, her green eyes looking thoughtful. "I understand."

"Is he OK? Can I see him?" Hermione asked urgently.

The woman smiled weakly. "Soon. But first, I think we need to establish a few things. There are things I need to know about the boy to help with his healing process. And I need to be sure that you are who you say you are. But first, since I am asking so much of you, would it help if I gave you my name? So that you may trust me?"

Hermione gave her a puzzled look. She didn't really care for the formalities, she just wanted to see Harry. But to appease the woman she nodded politely. The woman brought her hands up to her hood

and pulled the cloth back from her face, revealing a woman of her late 30's. Hermione gasped at her appearance, so familiar, her eyes especially. She had seen those eyes somewhere before.. on someone else. She looked exhausted. Her face was drawn and pale and large black circles surrounded those brilliant eyes. Something about her made Hermione feel as if she had known her for years, but she couldn't place how. The woman appeared highly confused by Hermione's interest in her appearance, but ignored her gaze and continued to address her.

"It is nice to meet you, Hermione Granger, my name is Lily Potter."

Hermione's eyes flew wide open in shock as she realized how she came to know those eyes. Suddenly the lights around her faded to swirling black, and she heard her parent's voices calling her name along with Lily's, then she remembered no more..

Chapter Seven: Shifting Perceptions

Harry's eyelids fluttered open. Everything was bathed in white light. He was lying in a four poster bed, covered in white quilts. The hangings around the bed were drawn back, allowing the bright light to shine through. A crisp breeze rustled the hangings gently as it swept smoothly between the posts. Harry sat up quickly and rubbed his eyes, looking about the strange room that appeared all in white. Then he realized that he could see.

"Am I dead..?" He asked aloud.

"No." Came a familiar voice from his side. "You're hovering between life and death."

"Sirius?" Harry's heart leapt as he looked to his left to see his godfather sitting in a chair at the side of his bed.

"Hello Harry. I wasn't expecting to see you so soon." Sirius said grimly, his face looking drawn with worry.

"I was hoping to see you this soon." Harry replied, with a small smile.

"Don't be so bloody stupid." Sirius said edgily, shifting his glance away. "Why didn't you stop him?"

"I couldn't." Harry said indignantly. "Dumbledore bound my magic."

"I know what Dumbledore did! Why didn't you fight your Uncle off? You could have got away, you're a smart boy Harry.. you've done it before." Sirius' yell fading to sadness.

Silence fell.

"I didn't want too.." Harry admitted quietly.

"Harry.." Sirius began.

"No." Harry interrupted. "You tell me, Sirius. Tell me what I have left to live for? Answer me that? Now that you're gone.. What do I have left?" His anger dissolving to tears.

"Hermione." Sirius said simply.

"Hermione?" Harry repeated. "She doesn't love me, Sirius. She only thinks of me as her friend."

"Did you ask her this? Or did you come to this conclusion on your own?" Sirius questioned with a raised eyebrow.

"It doesn't matter how I know, I just know." Harry said quietly.

"Perhaps," Sirius began thoughtfully, "You aren't as smart as I thought you were."

"Perhaps you're as big a pain in my ass dead as you were alive." Harry retorted.

A grin appeared on Sirius' face. "I missed you."

Suddenly, before he could answer, the world about Harry seemed to short out, the images before him distorting, then becoming clear once more. His perception flickered between the bright light of the room where he and Sirius sat, and another world bathed in complete darkness, like a dying street lamp. Harry looked around in alarm to see Sirius disappearing and reappearing from view in broken sections. All at once, voices came to his ears like interference on a telephone line.

..."He's gone all still.." a familiar male voice said.

"It's OK, he's still breathing. The pain relief potion must finally be having some effect.." a woman's voice came.

"I can't imagine how it has any.." His voice temporarily cut out, then continued. "...I wonder what his name is.."

"Harry?" Sirius' voice broke in, as the world dissolved back into the white room.

"What?" Harry shook himself, and the voices disappeared. "Who was that?"

"Who was who?" Sirius asked in confusion.

"Those voices.. they came out of the darkness.." Harry said lost in thought.

Sirius gave Harry a perplexed look. "OK, kid.. I didn't hear any voices. The only voice I heard was my desperate and lonely one saying how much I missed you. If you're just making up an excuse so you don't have to say it back you needn't bother.."

"Oh.. I missed you too.." Harry said quickly, and he meant it.

Sirius folded his arms. "Obviously." He said raising his eyebrow, "You journeyed all this way just to be with me, I should be touched, however, I find myself a little pissed off."

Harry groaned. "You made your point."

"No I bloody didn't. If you weren't already hovering between the two realms I'd kill you myself. What were you thinking, Harry?"

"I was thinking, Gee, I miss Sirius, I wonder what hell is like in the summer time, maybe I should pay him a visit." Harry replied.

Sirius gave him a scathing look. "Don't even think about giving up Harry. You're going back."

"How did I know you'd say that?" Harry said in a bored voice.

"Because, like I said Harry, You're a smart boy." Sirius said with a small smile.

"Sirius.. Things are so bad back there.."

"I know, Harry. But you'll get through it. You have a long road ahead of you, but you can do it Harry, I know you can." Sirius said bracingly, clasping Harry's shoulder.

Harry nodded soberly, staring down at his fidgeting fingers picking at the quilt on his bed. Seeing Sirius was something he had not expected yet had secretly hoped for. Despite the fact that he knew he

now must go back, he felt some comfort in having talked with his Godfather. He only wished that he could always find a way to talk to Sirius.

A sudden flicker of darkness overpowered the white room once more, but came and went with the blink of an eye. Harry spun his head around to look at Sirius. To Harry's surprise, Sirius did not seem to notice that anything had happened at all. As it disappeared Harry found himself wondering what it was, what was causing it, and who the voices belonged too. Suddenly a thought entered his mind and he looked up from the bedcovers to face Sirius.

"Sirius?"

"Yes?"

"If I'm not alive or dead.. and I can see you.. Can I see my parents? Are they here too?" Harry asked quietly.

Sirius frowned. "No Harry, I'm afraid that's just not possible."

Harry looked slightly annoyed. "But I can see you. Why not them?"

"You just can't Harry."

"Don't they want to see me?" He asked angrily.

"Oh they do."

"Then where are they?"

"They're with you." Sirius said quietly.

"What?" Harry said looking around. "No they aren't. What are you talking about? If you say 'they're in my heart, always', I'll kick your ass."

Sirius smiled sadly. "That's not what I meant."

"Then what did you mean?"

"I'm sorry Harry, but there is someone else here who wants to meet with you." Sirius pushed forward.

"Who?" Harry asked in surprise.

Sirius grinned. "You'll see. Might want to think about getting out of bed though."

Harry looked down and threw the bedcovers back, swinging his legs over the edge of the bed. His chest was bare of clothing, but he wore a pair of long black cargo pants that dragged on the ground around his bare feet. His jet black hair was scruffy as usual and it remained that way despite his attempts to smooth it out.

"Where is this person?"

"We have to go to him." Sirius said, standing lightly from the chair.

"Him?"

Sirius grinned again. "You'll see when we get there."

"I hate it when you know something I don't. You enjoy rubbing it in way too much." Harry grumbled as he pushed himself to his feet, causing another flicker of the strange darkness. Wary, Harry tested his footing on the wooden floorboards before putting his full weight on the ground.

Sirius shrugged, not noticing Harry's cautious movements.

"It's a weakness." He admitted.

As Harry stood he got his first real look of the room he was in. It was a large room, sporting a large window reaching to the floor on the eastern wall. The bright light emanated from the window, filling the whole room which shone pearly white. The floor was comprised of solid oak floorboards, that shone brilliantly, their color absorbed by the strange light. A door stood ajar opposite the window, revealing black.

"Through there?" Harry asked hesitantly.

"No. You can't go through there yet." Sirius said grimly.

"Then how do we get out?" Harry asked, puzzled.

"Get out?" Sirius asked in surprise.

Even as the words left Sirius' mouth Harry noticed the room was disappearing. The walls about him seemed to be unmaking themselves, disappearing piece by piece back down to ground level. As he turned to look behind him he noticed the bed had vanished, and in its place was the shore of a large lake that glistened in the same white light that was now emanating from the sky. Turning back to Sirius he saw that they now stood on the edge of a forest clearing, where the trees broke to make way for the lake. The great Willow trees towered above them, waving their branches mournfully in the same breeze that had blown through Harry's bed moments ago.

"Sirius.. What just happened?" Harry asked in awe.

When Sirius didn't answer Harry turned around to find him staring out over the lake.

"Where are we?" Harry asked again.

"Where Myrddin Emrys has decided to meet you." he replied.

"Myrddin Emrys? You mean Merlin..?" Harry asked in surprise, as suddenly a figure appeared in the lake.

On the edge, standing in the shallows of the water, a lone figure stood, black against the harsh light. Once again the darkness flickered through his vision, only this time it did not disappear so quickly. The world began to fade in and out, as if he were flicking back and forth between dimensions, never fully being in either one at any time. The voices came to his ears again, muffled, as if he heard them from afar.

... "I'm going to try the owl James.. ...know how long he will.. ...needs to know.. maybe if she sees him.." the woman's voice broke and crackled.

"... Don't think it'll... It'd be a miracle... ...recognize him anyway..."

"Harry?" Sirius repeated.

Harry jumped, shaking his head hastily to bring the world back into focus.

"Sorry.. Is that him?" Harry said, as he gazed at the shadowy form in the water before.

Sirius nodded.

"I can't see.. the light is too bright." Harry said wincing as his eyes watered.

Sirius laughed quietly. "He will reveal himself to you. But now I must go."

"What? No." Harry said in panic.

Sirius laughed. "Don't worry Harry, I'll be here when you're done."

"Oh." Harry said quietly, relaxing a little.

"Good luck." Sirius said, and in a moment he disappeared.

"Wait!" Harry called. "What does he want?"

The crisp breeze blew through his hair and he shivered, wrapping his arms around his bare chest. Sirius did not answer. Harry's gaze shifted back towards the lake, and he froze when he saw that the shadowed figure was stopped, perfectly still, just staring at him. He was standing in the rippling water that rose half way between his ankles and his knees. The cool breeze rustled his hair, picking it up and setting it back down, tangling it over and over. His dark form looked eerie in the strange light.

"What do you want?" Harry called, a little more defensively than he had intended.

The silhouette raised his hand, and the bright light dimmed, revealing his form. Harry moved forward against his will, and as he drew nearer

the ancient wizard he had heard of was even more all powerful and awe inspiring than his legends let on. Yet he was not as Harry as expected. Not some battle scarred old man, showing the wear and tear of time. He seemed innocent, and childlike.

Before him stood a young man, of only 19 years he guessed. His short dark hair hung in thick strands that danced about his face in the breeze. His skin was that of a man who had seen many years of sun, dark brown, yet still youthful. His hazel eyes held a twilight of knowledge and memory in their depths. As the water lapped around his legs, he looked upon Harry as if looking upon some wonder of the world.

"Harry Potter. At last we meet." A youthful voice said. "I am Myrddin Emrys"

"Why did you wish to see me?" Harry asked curiously.

"Because we have much in common, you and I. And there is much for you to learn." Myrddin said grimly.

"What do you mean?" Harry asked in confusion.

"I was like you once, Harry Potter. Special, never wishing to be. People hold ones like us in such high regard, and force such high expectations on us. Sometimes it seems that all the world is pushing you down into the very depths of the earth, and you cannot find a way to rise up. But you are destined to rise up, as I once was, you are destined to be a savior to your people."

"I don't want to be. I can't do it. I'm not powerful enough to take on Voldemort alone. I'm not ready.." Harry said anxiously.

"Ready or not, the time has come. And you must fight. I have brought you here so that I may help you, for without my help, you will never use magic again." Myrddin said gravely.

"I don't understand.." Harry said defeatedly.

Myrddin gave Harry a small smile "You will, in time. I have much to teach you, so that you may prepare for the coming war. You are the chosen one, Harry Potter."

"Chosen One? Too many people have died to protect me, too many people have been sacrificed. I can't do this anymore.." Harry said slightly angry.

"Think of how many others will die if you do not fight? You have heard the prophecy. You are the only one who can defeat Voldemort. You and you alone. If you do not fight, Millions will die." Myrddin said sadly. "It is not fair, but alas, it is the truth. Your life is not your own to govern. It never has been. Too many lives depend on you."

"What must I do?" Harry asked reluctantly.

"Train. Focus." Myrddin said.

"My magic was bound. Dumbledore.. " Harry began to explain.

"Your magic broke free." Myrddin replied. "And in the process it destroyed your core."

"My magic was destroyed?" Harry asked in horror.

"No. Not your magic." Myrddin said with an understanding smile. "Your magic's core. Magic still runs as richly through your veins as it did the day you were born."

"What does that mean?" Harry asked fearfully.

"It means," Myrddin replied, "That you will no longer be able to use a wand."

"But then how..?"

"..Will you focus your magic?" Myrddin finished for him, "That is what I have brought you here to learn. Do not make the mistake, Harry Potter, of thinking that I will grant you amazing powers to use at your own will. No, everything you gain from me will be learnt with hard

work. I will give you the means to focus your power and increase it, I will not do it for you."

Harry looked upon Myrddin, and suddenly found a great wave of respect for the wizard wash over him.

"When I am done, you will not have all my knowledge, nor all my power. I am going to teach you to use your magic Harry, and then it is all up to you. The journey will help you discover the true extent of your powers."

Harry nodded solemnly, and even as he did, the darkness cut aggressively into the lightness of Myrddin's domain. The sounds became static, fizzing in and out of his range as the mysterious voices overpowered his mind.

...". Whoever he is.. he must have dangerous enemies.. He's only a boy James. Who would do this to a boy?"

"If our lives show anything, love, its that there are ruthless killers out there, and age matters not to them.. It's difficult to accept, even after all these years.. but it's the truth.."

"He looks as though he would be about sixteen.. About the age Harry would have been next week.."

"I know love.. I know.."...

*"What is going on?" Harry yelled clutching his head in his hands.
"Whose voices are those?"*

"I believe they belong to the man and woman who are attempting to heal your earthly body." Myrddin said simply, looking at Harry with interest.

"You can hear them?" Harry asked in surprise.

"No, but I can sense your presence fading."

"What do you mean?"

"Your perceptions are fading in and out, between the world of the living, and the world of the dead. You are receiving interference from the living world. You must be stirring. We haven't much time. If I must teach you, then it must be now."

"Why can no longer use a wand?" Harry asked quickly, still confused.

"A wand Harry, connects to a wizard's core and draws its power from it. You would have felt this when you first received your wand, the power that rose up in you, like a vibrating force. If there is no core for the wand to draw from, the wand is in effect, useless. When your core was shattered, your wand was made of none effect."

"So, I will need to draw the remaining pieces together? How?"

"Through meditation, and concentration. Focus will be the key." Myrddin said beckoning him into the water.

"Meditation?"

"I will show you." Myrddin said smiling at the boy's confusion.

"First," He stated as he took Harry by the shoulder and turned him to face out into the glistening lake. "You must clear your mind of all outside thought."

Harry looked at the wise man skeptically.

"Close your eyes, Harry."

Harry took a deep breath and let his eyelids fall shut, blocking out all light and form.

"Darkness is your friend Harry. It removes all distraction from your mind. Nothing will penetrate its veil." Myrddin's voice came from all around him.

Harry found the vast darkness before him calm and endless. His body began to relax, letting the darkness consume him, blocking out all outside influences.

"Good. Now, listen Harry. Listen to the water lapping around your legs, listen to the gentle breeze that pushes it. Let the water wash away all thought from your mind, let the breeze whisk your worries far from you."

Harry listened to the serenity of the water and the breeze, letting it drive all thought and concern away from his self. Slowly his mind emptied, and the calming sounds filled his mind, it was an empowering feeling. As the worry, the pain, the grief, the restlessness in his soul slowly sapped away, he felt something he had never felt in his life. Free. After what seemed an age, Harry was amazed to find his mind was clear of all conscious thought. Myrddin smiled at his astonishment.

"Good, good. You learn quickly. With practice this state will be easier to achieve, you will obtain it instantly with little effort. But now comes the difficult part. Now you must seek out your magic."

"How?" Harry asked eagerly, his eyes squeezed shut as he focused on the nothingness within him.

"Delve within yourself.. Feel out its presence.. Delve deeper, deeper.. find your magic.. find it where it flows.."

To Harry decades seemed to come and go as he searched within himself for his magic, feeling out every corner of his being. Frustration waxed and waned as he searched blindly for the power he possessed. He could hear the crackling interference still coming through from the living world, despite the fact that he could no longer see the darkness approach with his eyes already closed.

"Relax Harry.. Empty your thoughts.. It will show itself.. "

He could hear his heart beating rhythmically.. sense the blood being pumped through his veins.. feel his lungs expand and retract with his raspy breaths.

"Feel it out Harry.. You will sense it.."

All at once, when he was about to give up, he found it, and it hit him like a dawning light. He had found his core. Or rather what was left of

it, for within him, his magic was in disarray. It flickered in and out, like a light bulb about to blow, sending sparks shooting out in all directions. His core had become a mass of streams, all branching off one another throughout his body.

"It's destroyed." He relayed for Myrddin. "Its sending out streams... thousands of streams throughout my entire body.. Its flickering.. like its fading.."

Myrddin nodded thoughtfully. "You've done extremely well, Harry Potter. But now the real challenge begins. I must teach you to rearrange those streams, and direct them into a small band of larger channels. Your magic, as it is now, is too erratic.. To unpredictable .. too dangerous to control.. It would destroy you if you attempted to use it.." he stated gravely.

"Why can't I just force it back into its core?" Harry rationalized.

"Ah." Myrddin said with a smile, "A good idea in theory. Indeed theoretically perfect. But what if I told you, impossible to maintain?"

"The pressure would be too much for it?"

"Yes!" Myrddin said with praise. "You see, now that the channels have opened, it is impossible to contain them within their core once more. It's rather like trying to fix a broken vase. By putting all the pieces in the right place, you may succeed in recreating the vase. And it may function as a vase again for a short period of time, but soon it will leak.. and in the end shatter once again under the strain of performing its duty."

"I see. So creating several larger channels out of the broken streams would lessen the strain.."

"Correct."

"But will my magic be as powerful as before?" Harry asked anxiously, focusing on his magical energy.

"Yes," Myrddin replied simply. "Even more powerful than before once I have given you the tools to unlock the full potential of your power.

But first I must teach you how to merge the streams of your broken power, for that is the first task you must accomplish once you are well enough."

"Can't we fix it now, while I'm with you?" Harry asked in disappointment.

"No, I'm afraid not Harry Potter. For you see, you are not one with your body at this moment, and even if you were, you are not strong enough to heal your physical wounds, let alone rebuild your entire magical structure." Myrddin explained with a small smile. "None the less, I will show you what you need to know."

"I see." Harry replied, maintaining his focus.

"When you have found your magic streams, you must then focus on them so deeply, that you can feel them pulsing out through your body. Listen to them flow, feel their rhythm, watch them stream through you. You must focus all your energy Harry, every ounce of your being into seeing those streams merge, force them together Harry. Force them to merge into at least four large channels, at the least Harry. Do not, under any circumstances attempt to rebuild your core.. for you will be destroyed."

"That's it?" Harry asked in surprise. "Just focus on merging them into four channels?"

"It sounds simple, doesn't it?" Myrddin said with a knowing look. "Yes, it does. But it is more difficult than you may think. Once you have focused, and the magic begins to merge, you must maintain your focus no matter what. Any slip, any minor glitch in concentration, and you must start all over again."

Harry nodded to show that he understood.

"Good. Now open your eyes, Harry Potter." Myrddin said gravely.

Harry's eyelids flickered open and he forced them to remain that way, even though they watered from the harsh contrast in light. As they adjusted Harry noticed that the world about him was now madly flickering to darkness, as though soon it would completely disappear.

Myrddin seemed to have realized that his time was running out, as he now spoke hastily and urgently.

"Repairing your magical flow will not be an easy task. It may take you a long time, and I strongly recommend that you do not attempt to do so until you are fully well, as it will mentally and physically drain you for many days. I am well aware, however, that time is something you do not have a lot of. The war has begun, and you are needed. Therefore I will help you prepare, But you must know that I cannot perform miracles. I will however, unlock a sleeping power within you, one that you do not know you possess. The power of knowledge absorption."

"What is that?" Harry asked curiously.

"It means, Harry Potter, that when you awaken, you will be able to absorb knowledge from any book, any book containing magical knowledge that is, without even opening its cover. All that knowledge; spells, cures, antidotes, information on magical creatures, all that knowledge will be stored within the banks of your memory for you to draw upon at will. I do not think I need to tell you how useful this skill will be in your preparation for your battle with the dark lord."
Myrddin said, looking pleased with himself.

"No. No you don't.." Harry said thoughtfully, he knew that, if true, this skill would be an amazing ally.

"I am afraid time is running out Harry, you must return now." Myrddin said gravely, "I wish we had had more time, but you know now all the things I needed to teach you. And I believe you wish to see young Sirius Black one more time before you return." He added.

"I do.." Harry said, "I .. I don't know how to thank.."

"Do not thank me, Harry. Just use my shared wisdom and fulfill your destiny. Put aside your fears. Put aside your fears and fight for those you love. Fight for the ones you love, and fight for the honor of those who are gone." Myrddin said quietly, looking up at Harry meaningfully.

"For Love and Honor.." Harry repeated, mirroring Myrddin's gaze. "I can do that. I can do that.."

Myrddin smiled, his twilit eyes sparkling with pride. "You will be great , Harry Potter. Your name will be immortalized in legend as the unwilling soldier who defeated the darkest of wizards. Now go, Sirius is waiting for you."

Harry turned around quickly to see that Sirius was waiting for him on the edge of the lake. As he turned back to farewell Myrddin, he was alarmed to see that the wizard had disappeared. He looked for him for several minutes, scanning the horizon of the lake, but soon it became apparent that Myrddin was gone, and would not be coming back. Slightly saddened, Harry turned toward the shore and walked to Sirius, who stood waiting for him.

"How did it go?" Sirius asked as they began to walk away from the lake. The world was so badly distorted now that the light no longer burned Harry's eyes. He knew his time was coming to an end.

"He's so young.." Harry said in awe. "Yet so old.."

Sirius smiled. "The innocent vessel of a child is not often thought to possess the wisdom and knowledge of an ancient man who has witnessed the world turn. Myrddin is an elaborate book with a simple cover, many a foolish man has made the mistake of judging him by it."

Harry nodded. He could imagine that that would be so.

"He taught me many things.."

"They will be useful in the times to come." Sirius said solemnly.

"Don't worry, Sirius.. I'll be careful.." Harry reassured him.

Sirius nodded slowly. "It's such a heavy burden for one person to bare.."

"It's my destiny.." Harry said quietly.

Sirius nodded again. "You will be careful, won't you? I can't protect you from here.."

"I will." Harry said, looking at his feet, not wanting his godfather to see the tears forming in his eyes.

"Many things will change when you wake.. Things you thought you had lost, you will find.. Love you thought you would never receive will be revealed.. There are more lives at stake now than there were before.. I wish I could be there to guide you, Harry.." Sirius said, becoming very interested in his fingernails.

"You do guide me, Sirius.." Harry said quietly, looking up at him for a brief moment with what only could be called love, before looking away swiftly.

Sirius smiled, a lone tear slid from his cheek and fell to the ground.

"I never told you.. But I love you like you were my own son, Harry.. Never forget that.. no matter what." Sirius said in a sad voice, filled with regret and longing.

"I won't.." Harry replied, blinking repeatedly as he looked down at his shoes. Stray tears fell that he did not wipe away.

"It's time for you to go Harry.." Sirius said softly, after several moments of silence.

Harry looked up, and realized that they were back in the white room. The door opposite the window that opened to the darkness had edged wider, revealing a thicker stripe of black. "I didn't realize I would have to leave so soon.."

"I wish I could come with you Harry.. But my place is here now.." Sirius said sadly, understanding the meaning behind the boy's words.

Harry nodded solemnly. "Will I see you again?" He asked hopefully, looking up into Sirius' dark eyes.

Sirius smiled, his eyes shining with unshed tears. "One day, Harry. One day.."

Darkness engulfed everything..

Author's Note: Ok guys, just to clarify a few things, Harry is not going to wake up all powerful, all knowing or all seeing. That isn't the intention of this chapter, Harry will wake up exactly as he was when he passed out if he wakes up at all. Myrddin has only instructed Harry on how to fix his magic, (he did not do it for him) something he would not have been able to do without the guidance, and has unlocked the knowledge absorption ability. Thats all, I promise. Also, incase anyone was highly confused by the use of Myrddin (which i doubt, but will explain anyway for the sake of explaining), Merlin is the Latinized version of the Welsh name Myrddin, which Emrys (or Ambrosius) Aurelian was later come to be known by. As you can see i combined the use of the two names. Hope that answers a few questions for you all. Now.. Chapter Eight you will be pleased to know is already completely, and will be posted in a few days once I have begun chapter nine. I hope everyone is glad to see Harry back in the story with a more prominent part in this chapter. Now, onto the reviews. The whole.. what 65 of them for this chapter? Wow guys, that was amazing, thank you so much for your continued reviewing and support. Its great to know your enjoying it. Here I will reply to some of your reviews, I wish i could to all but hell id be here for another five days just doing that and then you'd all be cranky cause I haven't posted in a while. So to all of you who do not get a mention, Thank you so much for your reviews they are wonderful and I hope you all enjoy this chapter. Until chapter Eight...

Elyse90505: Alright, yeah i felt bad that Anna betrayed her sister, but it was out of love and concern so you have to give her that. Hopefully you enjoyed this chapter with Harry, he'll be in the next one too I promise. And you will also find out how pregnant Hermione is in the next chapter, i wrote that in just by your request. As for the timeline of the story, we're still figuring it out as it goes along, it could end much later than Hermione giving birth at this stage, we are not sure yet but will keep you posted. I'm glad you enjoyed chapter six so much, hopefully chapter seven is up to your standard as well. Thanks a lot.

Chapter Eight: I Know The Pieces Fit, I Watched Them Fall Away..

Hermione moaned groggily as the lights above her swam into view hazily. A crowd of faces were staring down at her where she lay, on her back on the hard wood floor of the Sunset Inn. The three faces closest to her belonged to her mother, her father and a woman that she vaguely remembered meeting. As she looked into her eyes it again dawned on her who she was in the presence of. Someone until a few seconds ago she had believed dead for over 14 years.

Lily Potter.. Harry's mother..

"No.. You're dead!" Hermione exclaimed feverishly, looking up into the eyes of Lily Potter.

Lily looked at Hermione in shock. "What did you say..?"

"Hermione.. Are you alright?" Her father asked urgently interrupting, looking at her in concern.

Lily paled slightly, biting her lip, staring at Hermione with a peculiar expression on her face. How did this girl know who she was? Did she really know? Or was her comment part of some hallucination brought on by her fainting. After all, how could a fifteen year old know that Lily Potter was supposed to be dead? She thought she would be safe, but now she was not so sure. She regretted being so naïve in the giving of her real name almost instantly, but she knew there was always the memory charm to fall back on..

Hermione shook her head wearily to clear her vision and regain her senses. "Fine.. I'm fine dad."

"What the hell happened?" He said in shock.

"I.. I don't know.. I just got so dizzy.."

Hermione's mother gave John a knowing glance. "It must be the baby, Dear. The lack of sleep and lack of food on top of being pregnant will have worn her out. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.."

"No Mum." Hermione said in alarm, her eyes darting between her mother, father, and Mrs. Potter. "I'm fine now. Really. I need to know that he's OK."

"Everyone stand back please, give her some air." Lily said loudly, snapping out of her troubled thoughts and staring down the crowd who had flocked over to have a look.

As the crowd dissipated Lily moved over Hermione to examine her. "You're pregnant?" she asked for confirmation.

Hermione nodded wearily.

"How far along?" Lily prompted her, still looking slightly shaken.

"About seven weeks, I think.." Hermione tried to think.

"And she hasn't been eating or sleeping?" Lily fired at Hermione's mother and father.

"Well no.. she's been so worried about .."

"Mum! I'm fine. Stop fussing.." Hermione cut her off urgently.

Lily ignored her and yanked her shirt up a little, placing her bare palm on Hermione's stomach.

"What are you doing?" Hermione, her father and her mother all said in unison.

"Checking on the baby. Don't panic." Lily said with a bemused smile, "Baby is fine. You on the other hand, are physically drained and in need of decent food and a good night's sleep."

Hermione looked up at the grandmother of her unborn child, frowning down at her in concern. She still could not believe that this woman was Harry's mother, what's more, Harry's supposedly *dead* mother. She couldn't help but wondering if this was all some kind of bizarre dream brought on by the lack of food and sleep they were discussing. Lily looked down at her with a stern gaze, that told her much more

than her words did. *Not eating and avoiding sleep was a stupid thing to do when you are pregnant..*

"I'll be able to sleep a whole lot better when I've seen him." She said quietly.

Lily frowned and got to her feet, looking down at Hermione who looked rather pale. "Can you stand?"

"Of course." Hermione said indignantly, slightly irritated. "I'm pregnant, not disabled."

She sat up and struggled to her feet, her father grabbing her arm to steady her as Lily couldn't help but grin.

"Sit down." Lily said, pulling up a chair for her.

"Thanks.." Hermione said, trying not to stare at the mother of her best friend in a way that may provoke questions.

Her father helped her into her seat, causing her to groan in annoyance, before pulling up a chair for his wife then himself. Lily returned to her seat opposite Hermione and sat down, clasping her hands underneath her jaw and looking at Hermione intently.

"Are you sure you are well?" Lily asked again in concern.

"I'm fine. I promise." Hermione said in a dismissive voice. "I just want to know he's OK.."

Lily nodded. "Very well. But first.. Perhaps you should introduce me to your parents?" She asked with a small smile.

"Oh.." Hermione said apologetically. " Lily, this is My father, Jonathan Granger.."

"How do you do?" Jonathan said holding out his hand to shake Lily's.

"And my mother, Julia Granger" Hermione continued.

"Nice to meet you." Her mother said with a smile.

"Mum, Dad, This is Lily.." Hermione paused.

..Potter." Lily finished for her, mistaking her pause for a memory lapse.

"Potter?" Jonathan said in surprise. "Is she a relation of ..?" He asked, turning to Hermione.

Hermione kicked his ankle so hard that he yelled, as she said "No Dad, I don't believe she is."

"Relation of?" Lily asked in confusion.

Jonathan's eyes were watering so hard that he could barely see Lily staring at him.

"Just a friend of mine.. A much older friend." Hermione said as she looked at her father, her eyes boring into his meaningfully. Jonathan had no idea what was going on, why he was being kicked or why he was being silenced. All he knew was that he was getting increasingly angry at his youngest daughter, and was very close to calling her out on her lies.

"I see.." Lily said quietly, her eyes becoming suspicious.

"But please, how is he? Is he alright?" Hermione said pleadingly.

Lily's thoughtful look turned to a frown, "Where do I start?" she asked with a sigh.

"How bad is he?" Hermione answered her rhetorical question without thinking.

Lily's frown widened. "Quite bad I'm afraid. Obviously, he is a wizard?" She asked.

"Yes. The most powerful student at Hogwarts." Hermione said quietly.

Lily's expression changed, as though she were puzzled by something. "He doesn't want to be saved..." she muttered absently under her breath.

"What?" Hermione said anxiously, not quite hearing what she said.

Lily looked up at Hermione as if only just remembering she was there, and gave her a small, weak smile. "His magic appears to be trying to heal him on its own, but his wounds, as I said, are very extensive..."

"Surely there is something you can do for him?" Hermione asked desperately.

"I certainly hope so, Miss Granger.." Lily said quietly. "Is he allergic to any potions that you know of? Any antidotes?"

Hermione strained to think, "No, none that I'm aware of.."

"Good... good." Lily said, apparently lost in thought. "I may have something.. and I have a feeling that it might help if you were there while I attempt it."

Hermione looked up in disbelief. "Well, then we should go! He shouldn't be alone.."

"Oh he's not alone.." Lily said with a small smile. "But you are right, we should be going. Would your parents like to accompany us?"

"Yes." Jonathan said loudly before Hermione could stop him. "Yes, We would. Thank you."

Hermione rolled her eyes as he glared at her, still remembering the throbbing of his ankle.

"Very Well." Lily said, rising from her chair. "You've apparated before?"

"If that's what you call how we got here, then reluctantly yes." Jonathan said with a glint of fear in his eyes.

Lily laughed, "It takes a bit of getting used to, I'll admit that."

Lily then turned to examine Hermione. "You look awfully young to hold an apparition license."

Hermione went slightly pink. "Well.. I um, actually don't have one.. yet."

Lily looked slightly impressed. "You realize the dangers of splinching are very high if you are not properly trained?"

"Yes, But I've taught myself from books, its all about concentration really, if you focus then generally you'll be OK." Hermione said casually as they walked back into the dark alley behind the Sunset Inn.

"True." Lily said impressed with her knowledge. "But there are still risks. You ought to be careful."

"Wait a second.." Jonathan interrupted. "Just what exactly *is* splinching?"

"Well.." Hermione began awkwardly as they all held hands to prepare for their disappearance. "There's always a chance when an inexperienced person tries to apparate that they might accidentally end up stuck in two places at once. For example.. Half of you would end up in Lily's house, the other half would remain here.."

"What..?" Jonathan said in shock.

Lily chuckled quietly, and before Jonathan could back out, there was a loud crack and the four disappeared from the alleyway, causing a stray cat to shoot out from an upturned rubbish can. With an equally loud crack they reappeared a few seconds later in an unfamiliar yet beautiful living room with dark polished wooden floors.

"What the hell do you mean, half of me? Funny you didn't mention that before you used your mumbo jumbo on me the first time!" Jonathan roared at Hermione as they reappeared.

Lily cleared her throat and Jonathan turned to give her a sheepish look, eyes still watering in shock. "Welcome to my home." she said warmly. "I'm afraid you're the only guests we've ever had, before your friend of course, Hermione."

"Where is he? Can I see him?" She asked anxiously.

"Hermione! Don't be so rude." Her mother scolded giving Lily an apologetic look.

"That's quite alright." Lily said with a small smile to Hermione's mother. "Of course you can see him. But perhaps we should have a talk before you do.. It will be a bit of a shock I'm afraid.."

"Lily?" Came a curious male voice echoing through the empty mansion, "Lily is that you?"

"In the living room, James." Lily called. "She's here, she's come with me."

"Good, I'll be right there, he's been calling for her again" The male voice came from afar once more filled with concern.

Hermione's heart leapt uncomfortably. *Harry's father was alive too?* She could hear footsteps approaching the living room on the hard wood floors, drawing closer and closer. She couldn't understand what was going on. Harry's parents were dead, they had died fighting Voldemort off. They had died protecting him. She felt sure this was all some kind of dream. That was the only answer. That had to be the only answer. They would never have abandoned Harry..

The footsteps ceased outside the door leading to the living room, casting shadow along the strip of light that appeared through the crack beneath the door. The handle turned slowly and the door opened, and in the space that it revealed stood Harry. At least Harry as Hermione had imagined him to look twenty years from now, young, handsome, with his jet black hair just long enough to look scruffy. It was of course James that stood before her, but the resemblance was unmistakable. The only difference, was, as everyone had said, the eyes. Harry had Lily's eyes.

James looked over the guests in surprise. "And who are these lovely people, Lily?" He asked with a grim smile.

"Jonathan Granger. I'm Hermione's father. And this is my wife Julia." Jonathan said stepping forward to shake James' hand. "And you are?"

"James Potter." He replied, "You've met my wife Lily, obviously. Pleasure to meet you both."

"James Potter? Hermione what is going .." Jonathan began in confusion.

"Dad please be quiet I can't think straight." Hermione interrupted in frustration.

James glanced at Lily, then turned to the young girl. "And you must be the infamous Hermione?" James said smiling towards Hermione gently. "I imagine you have been anxious to get here. We won't delay you any longer than necessary."

"Perhaps," Lily said quickly, "There are some things you wish to know before you see him?"

Hermione thought for a second. "I saw his room, where he was tortured.. I know it's bad.. but.." her voice broke suddenly.

"You saw where he was tortured?" Lily asked in surprise.

Hermione nodded.

"Where?" James asked quickly.

"In his own home. Well, no, he never called it home. It was his Uncle's house. His Uncle did it to him.." she said, her voice vibrating with rage.

"Good God, You mean to say a family member did this to him?" James asked in horror.

Hermione could only nod as her voice failed her.

"I think we should prepare you for just how bad he is, Hermione.." Lily spoke cautiously.

"No." She said firmly. "I want to see him. Now."

Lily looked concerned, but nodded. "Very well, we can explain once you've seen him."

Hermione nodded again, trying to blink back the tears that had suddenly come upon her.

"He's upstairs." James said gently, taking Hermione by the arm.
"Come with me.."

"We should wait here for a while." Julia said to her husband with a meaningful look as she pulled him back down to his seat by his arm.
"Let Hermione see him first."

Jonathan looked at his wife with a frown then looked up at Lily.

"She'll be alright. We'll stay with her." Lily assured him.

She waved her hand and a pot of tea and a plate of toast appeared in front of them. "Make yourselves at home. I'll come down and get you in a few minutes." She said with a warm smile that turned to a frown.

"Thank you." Julia said gratefully, pouring out a cup of hot tea for her husband as Lily disappeared out the door after James and Hermione.

"Be prepared for a shock, Hermione." James said quietly as they climbed the staircase. "You may not recognize him at all. He is very swollen and badly bruised."

She nodded again, going into automatic response mode as her mind shut down with grief. As he looked up at James she still could not get over the staggering likeness between James and Harry. If he had been in the slightest bit recognizable they would have known in an instant that Harry was their son..

"I expect I won't recognize him if you haven't been able too." She said quietly.

James gave her a confused look. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing." Hermione said quietly. "I'm sorry.. I didn't mean anything.. I'm just so worried .."

James nodded. "Tell me, Hermione. How are things in the wizarding world? Lily and I have not had any contact with that world for a long long time.." He asked as if saddened by admitting it.

"Why not?" She asked innocently.

"We have good reason. Everything that was dear to us in that world was destroyed the night we left forever." He said trailing off sadly.

It was then that it dawned on Hermione that Lily and James believed Harry to be dead. How, or why, she could not say, but their pain was obvious. She wondered how they would feel when they discovered that the boy in their upstairs room was in fact their 15 year old son, whom they had believed dead for nearly 15 years.

"I'm sorry." Hermione said hopelessly, not knowing how or when to explain.

James gave her a bracing smile, his eyes alight with shining tears. "What's done is done. What of the wizarding world?"

"Not good, I'm afraid. The war has begun again." She said quietly.

"Again?" He asked in surprise. "You mean it ended once already?"

"Yes. It ended 15 years ago." Hermione said softly as they reached the top of the staircase, her heart beginning to race. "Which way?"

James shook himself out of thought, and pointed up the landing to a door at the far side. "Through that door."

Hermione took a deep shuddering breath, and moved slowly forward towards the looming door. She fixed her eyes on it, determined to reach it, step following weary step. She had been waiting for this moment for over a week. A week of worry, torment, pain, anxiousness. And now he lay just beyond the door in front of her. It seemed to take her an age to walk across the empty landing. She did not hear Lily come up beside James and take his hand. She did not hear James' voice as he asked her if she was sure she was ready for this. She did not hear them repeat her name in concern. In her mind,

She could hear Harry's painful, labored breathing as he lay beyond the door, beaten and broken, defenseless and alone..

The doorknob was in her hand, the cold metal biting at her warm skin.

Turn it. She instructed herself. *Just turn it.*

I can't.

Why not? He's waiting for you..

What if he doesn't make it?

That's something you'll have to prepare yourself for..

I don't want him to die..

If anything will help him.. It will be knowing he has someone he loves watching over him..

Hermione shook herself. James had his hands on her shoulders.

"Take your time, Hermione.." Lily said gently.

The doorknob turned beneath her hand and she felt the latch click. She released the handle absently, letting the door creak open slowly. As it opened, it revealed a large bedroom, bathed in moonlight from the large window that sat against the opposite wall. The heavy deep red drapes that hung from either side of the window were tied back with gold cord that dangled to the floor. The wooden floor boards were the same dark polished wood that ran through the rest of the house, covered in a large deeply embroidered rug that lay in the center of the room. The furniture in the room was all made of old oak that shone brilliantly in the moonlight. Against the left wall sat a large four poster bed, its light hangings tied back to reveal a shadowed form, lying amongst the blankets.

Hermione's breath caught in her throat as she looked at the still form lying there peacefully. She felt James' hand clasp her shoulder again as she closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She urged herself to step forward, one step after another, willing herself to move to his

side, fearful of what she might see. As she opened her eyes, she was at his bedside, and there at last, she saw him. The full impact of what she saw sent shock waves through every inch of her body. In that moment, she lost all her faith in human kind. Blinding tears filled her eyes and spilled over, rolling gently down her cheeks silently.

"How could anyone survive this?.." Hermione whispered to herself as she gazed upon his broken body.

She slowly reached out a quivering hand to Harry's face and ran the back of her fingers lightly down his blackened, swollen cheek. His dark hair, despite Lily's attempts to clean him up, was still matted with dark blood that seeped through partially healed cuts on his head. There was not an inch of flesh on his face that was not swollen or discolored from the pummeling of fists. The tone of his skin went from the darkest black to the deepest purple, to a sickly yellow. His eyelids were black and shiny, completely swollen shut and bulged awkwardly out from his face.

His bottom lip had a row of scabs running along the inside where his teeth had been driven through the flesh. A large crack split it open down the middle, quite likely, Hermione thought, from the impact of a fist. Dark finger-shaped bruises wrapped around the circumference of his neck, and had raised above the normal level of the skin. His breathing was shallow and his chest rattled as he drew breath in. His fingers twitched as she ran her fingers over his cheek lightly.

"You're OK now, Harry.. I'm here. I'm here.." She spoke softly through her tears as she gently brushed his dark hair back from his forehead.

She leaned over carefully and brought her lips to his forehead, brushing them against his fiery skin lightly. His lightning scar was not visible over the new damage. Harry groaned lightly and shifted awkwardly at her touch, grimacing in pain. Hermione squeezed her eyes shut in despair, praying that when she opened them that Harry would be sitting up, uninjured, smiling at her the way he did. Only when she opened them, he was still grimacing in discomfort, groaning in pain.

She turned her gaze to Lily and James, eyes blurred by tears. "What did he do to him?"

"I.." Lily began, searching for a reason not to answer.

"Tell me.." Hermione said firmly.

Lily gave James an awkward look as they both moved into the room.

"Was he worse than this?" Hermione asked again, her voice shaking.

"Much worse.." Lily said quietly.

"Tell me what he did.."

Lily glanced at James. "I - I don't know where to start.."

James placed an arm around her shoulder bracingly. "Perhaps you ought to sit down." He motioned to Hermione.

"I'm fine." She said stubbornly, her hand shaking as she stroked Harry's.

James nodded reluctantly, then began. "The boy has a very badly broken leg which by Lily's skills is beginning to mend, but as it was left so long.. it's taking a little longer than expected."

Hermione nodded again absently, knowing that he was saving the worst until last. He continued.

"The other leg, the right one, the knee cap was shattered. Lily has fixed that, but it will take him a while to work out the stiffness once he begins walking again. One hand has had all... all its' fingers dislocated. That was fixed easily but they'll be painful for a while."

Hermione saw the bruising around the knuckles of his right hand. Her eyes moved up to his face again, to the melted skin that surrounded his blackened and severely swollen eyelids. The scar tissue that was building up there was shiny and smooth.

"His eyes.. His Uncle's wife said that he poured acid into them. Do you.. can you tell if.. Is there anyway you can tell if he was conscious when .. when that happened?" She asked hesitantly, fearing she may not like the answer.

Lily swallowed hard. "I.. I'm afraid I don't know.."

Hermione nodded silently, a tear sliding down and hitting Harry's hand that she held tightly.

"What else?" she asked in a choked voice.

"Well.. he has several broken ribs and .. and a punctured lung. His back was torn to shreds.. It looks as though he was whipped. I've managed to clean that up as best I can.. But it will take quite a bit of healing.. " Lily stopped. "There's more Hermione.. But I think we should leave the details for later, don't you? You need time to adjust to this.."

Hermione nodded distantly, staring into Harry's face, stroking his hand in hers. "They fear that he is dead." She said absently, "They think that he was taken and killed."

"What? Who? Who thinks that?" James asked in surprise.

"Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix." She said bitterly.

Lily had gone very pale. "Dumbledore? Dumbledore is still alive?" She asked.

"Of course." Hermione said, looking up at her in feigned surprise. "But you're both wizards.. how could you not know that?"

James shot Lily a furtive glance, then cautiously replied. "Like I said, Hermione, we've been out of touch with the wizarding world for a long time." He said quietly. "The Order is still operating?"

"It started up again just over a year ago, when Voldemort restored his body." Hermione said.

"Wait.. What do you mean, restored his body?" James asked in confusion.

"He was destroyed almost 15 years ago. He attempted to kill a child, and the killing curse rebounded on him. His body was destroyed, and

the child survived. We had 14 years of peace. But he has returned." Hermione said cautiously, testing how much they knew.

James paled significantly, and lowered himself down onto the edge of Harry's bed.

"And what's worse is they think that it was me. They think that I killed him. They think that I sold him to Voldemort." She added angrily.

James head snapped up at these words. "Why?" he said sharply.

"Because I was there when the wards collapsed around his house, when the protection measures came down. I was outside his house when he disappeared." Hermione said quietly. "Certain members of the Order have had close dealings with friends betraying friends to Voldemort.. I think it hit a nerve.." she added carefully.

James shot Lily a meaningful glance, a glint of hope flickered through his eyes. Did this mean that Remus and Sirius lived on?

James straightened out his face then replied. "Well, we know you didn't sell him to Voldemort.. but why were you there?"

"To tell him that I was pregnant.. To tell him that I'm carrying his baby.." Hermione said, still absently stroking his hand.

Lily covered her mouth as she gasped. She did not know why she had not seen it before; the girls despair.. the way she looked at him.. Her distress..

"He doesn't know?" She asked quietly.

"No." Hermione replied softly. "Not yet.."

Lily realized that tears were stinging her eyes. She found herself asking how such a tragedy could occur, and run the lives of those so young.

"I will do everything I can, Hermione. I promise you that." Lily said, placing a hand on her shoulder and looking her deeply in the eyes.

Hermione nodded, fresh tears spilling over. "This would never have happened if Dumbledore hadn't bound his magic.." She burst out angrily.

"Dumbledore did what?" Lily said in outrage.

"He bound his magic. To 'Protect him'" Hermione mocked angrily. "His Uncle found out, when he tried to tell me and Ron. That's when his Uncle started beating him.. when he knew he couldn't fight back with magic.. His Uncle was always scared of his power.."

James looked appalled. "Why is Dumbledore so interested in this boy? What forced him to bind the boy's power to protect him...? Why are they so fearful for his life?" James asked in confusion.

"Because.. The boy you have in this bed is the boy who lived. The boy who destroyed Voldemort all those years ago, and he remains the only hope we have." Hermione stated grimly.

Both James and Lily's mouths fell open in shock.

"This is the child that Voldemort attacked? The one who destroyed his body?" Lily repeated in surprise.

"Yes." Hermione said shifting uncomfortably, knowing that soon she would have to reveal the truth.

"What is his name?" James asked suddenly, making Hermione jump.

"What?" She asked, swallowing hard.

"His name. What is it?" He asked, the urgency in his voice told Hermione he had finally put the pieces together.

"I - "

"You know about the betrayal.. You're close to the Order.. You know we're supposed to be dead.. don't you?" He said, standing up slowly and moving around the bed to stand before her.

He was breathing fast, in heavy, awkward movements, as though catching his breath from a long hard run. His eyes were staring at her, filled to the brim with hope and pain that mingled to form tears that threatened to spill over.

"Don't you?" He roared, his voice choking.

"James! What's the matter with you?" Lily asked in shock, moving to her husband to pull him back as Hermione jumped at his harsh voice.

"He's Fifteen isn't he? Sixteen next week?" James continued to rant, looking pleadingly at Hermione who could only watch him, and try to hold back her tears. "She knows Lily! She knows that we are thought dead.." He said dissolving into choking sobs as she pulled his stumbling form backwards.

Hermione froze watching James stagger back and forth, obviously in terrible emotional agony. The pain he portrayed was almost too unbearable to watch, and she turned her head away and looked at the floor. Her guilt said it all, but James did not back down. He only appeared to become more upset, and more desperate for answers.

"You said If I could not recognize him then you definitely would not be able too.. Who is he! What is his name!" James yelled in pleading despair.

Lily froze, becoming deadly pale. She looked at Hermione in surprise, a look of dawning comprehension in her eyes. "You said I was supposed to be dead when you woke .. You didn't faint from exhaustion.. You fainted from shock.. Didn't you?" She asked in a unnerving distant voice.

Hermione opened her mouth to speak, the guilt in her chest weighing her down as much as her grief, but before she could James interrupted.

"Tell me his name!" He demanded through choking sobs.

He stumbled forward throwing Lily off his arm, blinded by his tears. His chest heaved in agony. Clutching his head in his hands he ran his

fingers stiffly through his hair in frustration, tearing at it as though trying to cause pain somewhere else other than his heart.

"Is he my son?" James asked quietly at first, looking her shakily in the eye. "IS HE MY SON!"

Chapter Nine: Stricken By Revelations

As Hermione stared at James completely lost for words, the sound of loud footsteps thundering up the staircase came to her ears. The room vibrated violently as the footfall pounded across the landing toward the room where she now stood opposite Harry's distraught father. The door burst open with a crash as Hermione's father emerged, panting heavily, followed closely by his shaken looking wife. His eyes darted from Hermione, to James, to Lily.

"What the hell is going on?" He panted, looking bewildered. "What's all the shouting about?"

"Is he my son!" James demanded again stepping toward her, his voice breaking under the strain.

"Hermione.. what is going on?" Her father said approaching her angrily.

"Dad I.."

"They are his parents aren't they? Why didn't you say.." Her father began, panting heavily.

"Why didn't you tell us you knew we were presumed dead?" Lily asked in horror, completely ignoring Jonathan. "Why did you hide that, if not to conceal the truth from us?"

"I –" Hermione tried to speak, her voice shaking.

"Tell me his name.." James yelled in frustration, his eyes pleading with her to end his suffering.

"H- His name is Harry James Potter." Hermione said softly, her eyes welling with tears. "Also known in the wizarding world as the Boy Who Lived, the only known person to survive the killing curse, which was cast upon him at the age of one..."

James seemed to fall deathly still in front of her. His skin was void of all color, it had drained away from his face the second her words had

reached his ears. Despite knowing the answer before she gave it to him, his heart died when she spoke his son's name. His eyes were glassy and empty as though his very soul had been ripped from his body. They were trained on the boy lying on the bed behind her, out of focus, and blurred by uncontrolled tears.

"He survived... How did this happen..?" James whispered absently.

Behind him Lily slowly sank to the floor, her eyes wide with shock. She had been dreaming about this moment for fifteen years. For someone to appear and tell her her son was alive, that it was all a big mistake. In her dreams it had been beautiful, joyful, the best moment she had ever experienced. In her dreams she had never felt the lead weight in her stomach that pulled her to her knees. The weight of guilt that came when the full extent of those words came crashing down upon her. She had needlessly abandoned her son... for fifteen years.

"What have we done..?" She whispered to herself.

"Harry..?" James said softly, sniffing as he approached his son.
"Harry.."

As he reached his son, James expected to suddenly be able to recognize him, to suddenly have his features returned to normal, but it was not so. Harry grimaced uncomfortably as James took his hand in his, squeezing it gently. James looked upon Harry's bruised and swollen face in a whole new light as he squeezed his eyes shut slowly to prevent the fall of more threatening tears.

"I don't understand.." James cried in frustration. "How could this have happened?"

"Why didn't you say something?" Lily rounded on Hermione quietly.

I didn't know what to say" She stammered nervously, averting her eyes from James. "I didn't know.. what you knew.. or how much you knew.. I thought maybe that you had aban -"

"Abandoned him?" James finished angrily. "Abandoned our baby boy is that what you thought?"

"James.. Don't yell at her.. What was she supposed to think? We're alive, and everyone thinks we're dead."

"I would never abandon my son!" He roared, turning his attention swiftly back to Harry as he moaned in pain.

Lily staggered to her feet and rushed to Harry's side, feeling his forehead gently under her palm. He moaned as he rocked his head side to side, twitching restlessly. A strange glimmer shot through Lily's eyes, then faded as if she dared not hope for it. Lily frowned, pulling her hand from his forehead to brush his messy hair slightly out of his face. As she stroked his hair, Lily looked down on the young man before her.

"He's grown so much.." she murmured softly.

"What Lily?" James asked urgently.

"He's due for more pain relief.." Lily said absently as she removed her hand slowly from his forehead, and disappeared out the door to get her potions.

As she left, Hermione warily moved closer to Harry, glancing at James out of the corner of her eye. James looked up momentarily, and, when he looked away to Harry again, Hermione decided that he did not protest. James had seated himself next to Harry's hip, holding his hand bracingly as he shifted in pain. Hermione stepped up to where Lily had been standing at Harry's head, and stroked his hair gently. After several long and dreadfully silent minutes, Mr. and Mrs. Granger moved away to sit quietly in two chairs against the wall beside Harry's bed, ready to mediate if another argument broke out.

As Harry groaned, Hermione wondered where Lily had gone and what was taking her so long, it seemed like an age since she left the room. Hermione glanced nervously at James. He still looked completely shellshocked. His face was deathly pale and his eyes seemed dull. His temper seemed to have waned, but she could not blame him for being so upset. How could she? He had just discovered that the broken boy that had been caring for, the boy who had mysteriously appeared in their living room over a week ago was

none other than the son that they had thought dead for 15 years. What's more, she had tried to hide it from them.

"I'm sorry." James said gruffly to Hermione, breaking the silence.

"Please.. Don't apologize. I was wrong.. I just didn't know how to tell you.."

James laughed a hollow laugh. "Yes, I can see how it would have been difficult. Oh by the way.. He's your son.."

Hermione didn't quite know how to react, but her face must have said more than she intended.

"I don't blame you, Hermione." James said with a defeated sigh. "I understand. Please, forgive me. I just.. I don't know what to do.."

"All we can do is wait for him to get better..." She said quietly, trying to console him.

James looked up at her, his eyes held what looked like great disturbance."And then? What if.. What if he can't forgive us? What if he doesn't understand.."

Hermione did not know how to answer. She could not definitely say that Harry would forgive them. He had been through hell with the Dursleys.. School.. Voldemort.. and then there was Sirius. Sirius, who had been sent to Azkaban for thirteen years for the death of Harry's parents, who were, as it turned out, very much alive. Who, if they had not fled from the wizarding world, would have been able to save Sirius from all the suffering and pain in his last 15 years of life, and possibly from his untimely death. And all the while Harry had wished for his parents to be with him, through everything. And now, now they were, but would it be too late? As she looked down at Harry, struggling with physical pain, she could not say.

"What *did* happen?" She asked cautiously, her eyes flickering to James, "Why did you leave the wizarding world? Why did you think he was dead?"

James looked suddenly angry, and Hermione instantly regretted asking. It had been too soon. "I'm sorry.. You don't have too.."

"No. It's not that." James said stiffly. "It's.."

"...Mione.."

Hermione jolted as she looked down at Harry in shock. "Harry?" she asked urgently.

"... Mi... Mione.."

Jonathan looked up in surprise, but was stayed by Julia's hand.

"Harry? Are you awake?.." She asked hopefully, stroking his hair slightly faster than she meant too in anticipation.

James had half risen from his seat, gazing at Harry with overwhelming joy written all over his face. But Harry did not reply.

"Harry?" Hermione tried again, tears welling up in frustration. "Harry?"

James sank to his seat on Harry's bed again, looking drawn and disappointed. "He's unconscious again, Hermione." he said gently.

"But he was awake.. He was awake, wasn't he?" Hermione asked, hope rising.

But as he was about to explain, Lily returned carrying a glass bottle full of a clear blue liquid. Her reappearance caused Hermione's thoughts to switch. James stood up quickly as Lily approached. As Hermione looked upon her face, she realized why she had taken so long in finding the potion. Her eyes were watery and the skin surrounding them was pink and puffy. James stood up quickly, still holding Harry's hand as she reached his side, and Hermione stepped back so that she could administer the potion. Lily avoided looking into the eyes of either of them as she stepped up to Harry, feeling his forehead once again.

"Sit him up James. He needs to swallow this.." She said firmly.

James released Harry's hand, carefully placing it back on the bed as he moved up to take Harry about his bare shoulder's and lean him forward. Harry grimaced in agony, and that was when Hermione saw his back for the first time. It was red raw, covered in barely healed deep cuts that zig zagged their way across his flesh. Lily had cleaned them up well, but the sight still made Hermione's stomach lurch uncomfortably. She could see they had been oozing slightly, and Lily took the opportunity to look them over.

She nodded as if satisfied. "They are healing well." She said softly to Hermione, "It will take some time though."

Moving back around to Harry's front, Lily carefully measured out a precise dosage into a small measuring cup, and gently tilted Harry's head back as she poured the liquid into his mouth. Hermione looked away in distress as at least a quarter of the dose dribbled back down his chin. Lily wiped it off carefully, before motioning to James to lower him back down. Hermione noticed that once he was lying flat again, Harry seemed instantly more settled.

"His temperature is rising again.." She stated, replacing the cap on the bottle and placing it on the table beside Harry's bed.

"There must be something else we can do Lily.. Anything.." James said frantically. "We can't lose him now.. Not now.."

"It's up to him now, James.. But I think.. I think at last he is fighting.." Lily said shakily, looking upon Harry as his disfigured face screwed up tightly. "I think he knows you are here, Hermione.."

Hermione looked up at Lily in surprise. "He was awake." she said hastily, "He said my name."

Lily nodded. "He has been fading in and out of consciousness more frequently, but that does not mean he is out of the danger zone yet.."

Hermione's hope dwindled slightly. "But, he will be OK, won't he?"

"I don't know, Hermione.. I hope so.. I hope so."

James eyes flickered with urgency. He sat back down next to Harry and resumed holding his hand. "Come on, Harry... You have to fight it son, fight it.."

Hermione looked down at James' hand holding Harry's, and lost herself in thought. The look in his eyes as he worried about his son told her that under no circumstances had they knowingly left their son behind. What she could not understand, was how it had happened. How could they have thought him dead, and why? No matter how many times she thought it through, she could not find the answer. James had been about to tell her, she was certain of that.

James looked up at her and saw her thoughts. He frowned, glancing at Lily, who looked at him with hollow eyes. He could tell from her eyes that she was suffering the same guilt and frustrations that he was. His eyes turned to Harry, the missing part of his life for nearly fifteen years, lying right in front of him. His stomach clenched at the thought of all his son had been through, all because they had thought him dead. He returned his gaze to Hermione, and took a breath.

"Dumbledore." James said heavily.

"What?" Hermione asked in confusion.

"Dumbledore." He repeated chokily, giving her a dark meaningful look, before averting his eyes.

Hermione's mouth fell open in horror as the meaning of his words sunk in. The world about her seemed to spin as her stomach lurched in stunned realization. Dumbledore. Of course, she should have known. Everything that had ever happened to Harry, always came back to Albus Dumbledore...

There was a rush of green flame within the fireplace of the headmaster's office at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. As a young witch and a wizard both stumbled out of the grate in great haste, Dumbledore rose slowly from his seat at his desk, slightly shocked. The two people who had emerged where the last people on earth he had expected. For the two people who had emerged he had believed to be dead..

"Dumbledore.." James breathed heavily, panic evident in his voice.

"James? Lily?" Dumbledore asked warily, he was ghostly pale. "Good Heavens, where have you been? I feared you were .."

"He found us.. Voldemort.. He found us.." he panted.

"I know.." Dumbledore said quietly.

"We can't find Harry.." James said urgently. "We looked everywhere.. We can't find him.."

"Where were you, James?.. I've just been at Godric's Hollow.. You were nowhere in sight.. I thought he had killed you both.."

"He burst in.. We were fighting.. Lily took a stunner to the chest.. When I went to her side he flew straight past us up the staircase.. I revived her immediately and we cast Invisibility charms on ourselves to take him by surprise.. We tore up the staircase, merely seconds after him.. but before we got there.. there was an explosion.. or something.. I just remember light.. and.. flying backwards in the air.. And then I woke up still invisible amongst the wreckage of the house.. Lily was unconscious and invisible but I could feel her body beside me.. I woke her and we went to find Harry.. Harry was gone.. Dumbledore the house is blown apart.."

Dumbledore made no reply, he could only look upon them absently, lost deep in thought.

"Dumbledore.. What happened? Where is Harry? Where is my son?.." James pressed, dread welling up inside of his chest.

Dumbledore slowly sank into his seat once more, apparently overcome with grief.

"Dumbledore.." Lily whispered hesitantly. "Where is Harry..?"

"Voldemort.. Voldemort found him. I'm sorry Lily.. James.. There was nothing you could have done.."

"What?" James asked with a disbelieving laugh. "No.. No he can't have.."

"I'm so very, very sorry James.."

"No.. No.. Harry isn't dead..." Lily said with a laugh, which turned into a wail. "My Harry isn't dead!"

James grabbed Lily about the waist as she collapsed against him, dissolving into tears. James could not speak, his eyes were trained on Dumbledore, but he could not see him. Shock overwhelmed every inch of his body. He felt numb. Numb and empty. It couldn't be true.. He would not have let this happen to his own son..

"We didn't get there in time.." James said absently.

"Even if you had got there in time, If you had tried to stop him, he would have killed you too.. You know this.." Dumbledore said quietly.

"I would have died." James stated plainly. "I would have died before I let him take Harry.."

"Voldemort had this all planned James.. He would never have stopped hunting you.."

"So what?" James asked angrily, "What are you saying, That this was the best thing for everybody? My Son is dead!" James roared.

Lily burst into loud, uncontrollable sobs and James glared at Dumbledore, squeezing his wife to his chest tightly, protectively. He could not believe the old man in front of him, he could not believe that his son was dead. He was barely one year old.. Dumbledore gave James a saddened look, as though he were disappointed.

"Of course I didn't mean that James." Dumbledore said quietly. "I loved Harry too."

"My son is dead, Dumbledore.. All because of some stupid prophecy. He was just a baby.. Just a tiny, defenseless baby.. Our baby.." He said, looking down at Lily's stricken face.

"I just don't want you blaming yourself for something that was out of your control."

James looked at Dumbledore, still in shock, clutching Lily tightly in his arms. "Don't you dare tell me that this was destiny.. No destiny would destroy the life of an innocent child.." He said as tears stung his eyes.

Dumbledore looked down, not replying, his usually twinkling eyes were dull and faded.

"Are you sure?" He urged the old man in despair. "Are you sure that he is dead..?"

"I moved the body myself.."

Lily moaned and buried her head in James neck. James' eyelids flickered closed in defeat.

"Then we have failed him.."

"How were you to know that Sirius would betray you? As far as you believed, you were safe.." Dumbledore consoled him.

"Sirius?" James repeated in confusion. "No.. Not Sirius.."

Dumbledore's eyes widened slightly and there was a flicker of a frown. "Sirius wasn't the Secret Keeper?"

"No.. It was Peter." James said hollowly, "If we had made Sirius secret Keeper.. none of this would have happened.."

"Peter Pettigrew?"

"Sirius would have been too obvious, of course we would choose our best friend.." James said in frustration. "If only we had have chosen him.." "

"You cannot dwell on what if's James. Harry is gone." Dumbledore said sternly. "Now you must decide where you stand."

"What do you mean?" James asked in surprise.

"There is nothing left for us now, James.." Lily murmured in a dead voice.

"The wizarding community is under the impression that both you and Lily died along side Harry..." Dumbledore pressed.

James glanced at Lily, whose eyes were still streaming silently.
"What are you saying.." He asked cautiously.

"I am saying, you may either correct the world, tell them that you live.. or.."

"Or what?" James asked with a frown.

"Or start a new life.. Far from the wizarding world, away from the war.. Voldemort.. and the reminders of your.. failures.." He said subtly, eyeing them carefully.

James looked down at his wife. Lily strengthened herself and stood upon her own two feet, wiping the tears from her cheeks. Looking up into her husband's eyes, she gave him a weak smile, which made her lips tremble.

"I can't do this anymore James.. We've been fighting and hiding and living in fear for too long. And now Harry is dead. The one thing we were trying to protect has been taken from us."

"But Lily.. can you really leave this all behind?"

"I will never be able to look anyone in the eyes again.. Not when they know that we lived yet Harry died.. We could have stopped him James.." Lily trailed off into silent tears.

"James, I think it would be easier for you both.." Dumbledore said quietly.

"He's right James, Theres nothing here for us now.." She said in a hollow voice. "We did die tonight.. Even if we appear to live.. We are dead.. Lily and James Potter died the night their son was taken from them.."

"You need to focus on each other now," Dumbledore said softly, "You need to grieve, and there will be no time to grieve in the middle of a war.."

James sighed, hugging Lily close to his body. "You're right Lil.. There's nothing here for us now that Harry is gone.. We can disappear.. and no one will ever know.."

Lily nodded, rubbing her eyes and straightening her clothes. "We'll have to go soon.."

"Very soon. If you are serious about this, we can't afford to let anyone see you.." Dumbledore reminded them.

"Of course.." James said trying to think but finding his brain was still numb and horror filled, "But where should we go?"

A gleam of triumph shot through Dumbledore's eyes. "The world is a very large place, James. But I suggest that you go far, far away. You run less risk of being spotted. And besides.. you need a break, both of you. Take Lily somewhere nice.. Somewhere warm."

"Nowhere will ever be warm again.. Not now.." Lily said quietly.

Dumbledore gave Lily a bracing, saddened look.

"Look after her James.." Dumbledore said gently.

James looked at the old man through his blurred eyes and nodded. "We should go.."

"I want to see him." Lily piped up suddenly.

"What?" Dumbledore repeated in surprise.

"I want to see Harry.. before we go.."

"Lily I don't.." Dumbledore began hastily.

"I do too." James said firmly.

"I'm Sorry, very sorry.. but I'm afraid It's just not possible.."

"I don't understand.. You said you moved the b.. you said you moved him?" James said in despair.

"His.. He was badly burnt.. James.. beyond recognition.." Dumbledore replied, his eyes burning with sympathy...

James lowered Hermione down to sit on the edge of Harry's bed next to him. She had become so ghostly pale that he feared she might collapse.

"He told you he was dead.. But why..? Why would he do that?" Hermione asked in disbelief.

"Oh, he'll have his reasons, Hermione." James spat angrily. "Some ulterior motive. Albus Dumbledore always has a reason. And I will find out exactly what it is, as soon as Harry is awake..."

"James, Promise me you aren't going to do anything rash.." Lily said fearfully.

"You mean like kill him?" James snorted, "No, I won't give him the satisfaction, and I won't do that to Harry. I won't be sent to Azkaban for the rest of his life. We have fifteen years to make up for already, I don't want to miss out on anymore. But he will answer for what he has done.. He will pay."

James looked past Hermione at Harry's sleeping form. The swelling was slowly beginning to go down, yet as it did it only revealed more bruising and damage.

"I don't understand.. Who did this to him?" James asked, his anger suddenly bursting out after reliving the betrayal of a man whom he had considered wise and kindly.

"I told you.. his Uncle." Hermione whispered.

"Harry doesn't have an Uncle." James corrected her in frustration. "This doesn't make sense! You said he was living with his Uncle, Where is Sirius? He was supposed to go to Sirius if anything ever happened to us! Sirius was supposed to take him!"

Behind him Lily clapped her hand to her mouth in shock. "Yes he does James.. He does have an Uncle.. Petunia married..."

James face paled even further and his eyes widened in surprise. "No.. Surely not.. he wouldn't have.."

"His Uncle Vernon.." Hermione finished for her. "He's been living with your sister and her husband since... since it happened. Dumbledore left him on their doorstep himself"

"Dumbledore sent him to your sister?" James asked in disbelief. " To that oaf Dursley? Why? Why!"

"No.. Petunia wouldn't let this happen.. Surely.." Lily said in disbelief. "She's my sister.."

"She hated us, Lily! Her and that bastard of a husband of her's." James spat angrily.

"She still would never have let him hurt Harry..." Lily defended her.

"I assure you she did." Hermione said bitterly. "She was the one who told me about his Uncle using the acid.."

"That Son of a Bitch.. I'll make sure he never lays a finger on anyone ever again.." James said in a dark voice, filled with despair.

Lily sobbed in horror, clutching her stomach as though she were going to be sick. James pulled Lily onto his knee and wrapped his arms around her as she burst into violent sobs, gently rubbing her back as she choked on the lump that had formed in her throat. The betrayal of her sister was a bitter pill to swallow. She could not believe that her own sister would stand by and let her husband beat Harry to an inch of his life. It wasn't just abuse that Harry had suffered.. It was torture.

James yelled in frustration. "Dumbledore knew that Sirius was Harry's Godfather.. Why didn't Sirius take him.."

Hermione swallowed hard. How was she to tell Harry's father that Dumbledore's betrayal went further than he knew? That more lives

were destroyed than their own and Harry's? How was she to tell the destroyed man before her, that his best friend was dead?

"I don't think Sirius had a choice.. Mr. Potter.." Hermione whispered nervously.

"What do you mean?" James asked slowly, turning to her.

"Sirius wanted to take him.." She said gently, beginning.

"Why didn't he?" James asked, his stomach turning to lead.

"Mr. Potter.. There is something I have to tell you.." Hermione said cautiously.

"Hermione.. What happened to Sirius?" James asked slowly.

"He was sent to Azkaban for Thirteen years.." Hermione said quietly.

"What?" James asked in a distant voice, barely believing his ears.

"Peter Pettigrew set him up.. Sirius hunted him down. When he confronted him, Peter turned it around on Sirius, staging an argument, "How could you Sirius? Lily and James.. How could you?". Peter staged his own murder, framing Sirius, right then and there. He cut off his own finger, then blew apart a street, killing twelve muggles, and supposedly himself, but now we know he fled. Everyone believed Peter dead.. because all they could find was the finger. Sirius was sent to Azkaban without trial for betraying you to Voldemort.. and killing all those people.."

"But.. Dumbledore.. He knew.." Lily said in shock.

"Why?.." James asked in disbelief, "Why would he do that to Sirius?"

Hermione could only shrug. The more she learned of the truth, the more she could not place Dumbledore's motives. James leaned back as Lily got to her feet, stepping closer to Harry's face and she stroked his hair lightly. James punched his leg angrily, rising to his feet and cursing loudly. He paced backward and forward, completely oblivious to Jonathan and Julia Granger's stares.

"Why? Why would he drag Sirius down into this? Sirius did nothing wrong!" He yelled, overcome with anger.

Lily snatched James' hand and pulled him into her arms, hugging him tightly, forcing him to stop pacing. "It was convenient, James, what other reason could there be?"

"I'll kill him.." James said threateningly.

"James.. you promised!" Lily reminded him, "Think of Harry.."

"Lily.. He's betrayed us all! Look what he's done to Harry! Sirius.. in Azkaban for thirteen years! He'll never be the same! And us! We've believed our son dead for Fifteen years Lily, Fifteen years! When I'm through with him he'll wish he was dead.." James said darkly, his voice full of loathing and anger.

"James.." Lily began to protest.

"Wait.." James said suddenly, his voice full of hope as he turned to Hermione. "You said Sirius was sent to Azkaban for Thirteen years? So.."

"He was sent for life.." Hermione said slowly, realizing where James was headed, "He escaped after thirteen."

"Sirius escaped from Azkaban?" James said in astonishment, temporarily wiping his anger as an appreciative grin flickered over his face. "Trust him.."

"He escaped because he found out where Peter was. At Hogwarts in his animagus form.." Hermione said quietly. "He escaped to kill him. We all thought he was coming for Harry, until we discovered the truth.."

"Peter was at Hogwarts?" James asked in outrage.

"Yes.. Remus and Sirius caught him and revealed his true form to us. But he escaped before we could clear Sirius' name."

"Remus?" James repeated hopefully, "What was Remus doing there?"

"He was teaching Defense against the Dark Arts that year. He too thought Sirius was guilty.. Until he saw Peter's name on the Marauders map."

So Sirius is in hiding?" James pressed eagerly.

"He was.." Hermione said quietly.

"Was?" James repeated, the color draining from his face again.

"Sirius.. he died protecting Harry.. at the end of last year. He fell through the veil in the Department of Mysteries.."

James felt as though he had been hit by the Hogwarts Express. One he thought dead, his son, was alive, and one he had thought alive, his best friend, was now dead. Not only dead, his life had been destroyed the day that Voldemort attacked Harry. Four lives had been destroyed that night, all at the hands of Albus Dumbledore...

"Dead.." He repeated slowly.

Hermione nodded slowly. "Harry has taken it very hard.. He thinks he's losing everyone he loves.. You, Sirius.. people are dying all around him. He's afraid to love.. He's afraid to love anyone incase they are taken from him like you were.. Like you and Sirius.." She said to them both.

James had fallen silent and Lily was wide eyed with shock.

"The last few years.. Sirius has been like a father to Harry.." Hermione said quietly. "Sirius.. he really loved Harry.."

James nodded slowly, lost in overwhelming grief. At least Harry had known the love of the one person they had wished to be his father if ever they were to die. At least he had known Sirius.. Even if it was only for a short time..

"Good.." He said in a hollow voice. "Good..."

Chapter Ten: Sweet Dreams and Flying Machines In Pieces On The Ground...

Silence reigned in the Potter household. Hermione, Lily and James maintained a silent bedside vigil as they absorbed their new found revelations. No one had spoken since Hermione had revealed the circumstances of Sirius' death. For the first time since James had begun to realize that the boy in front of him was his son, he was subdued. Lily had also appeared to dissolve into her own personal shocked state, she had stood at the end of Harry's bed and stroked his hair absently for the past thirty minutes.

Hermione had retained her seat on the edge of Harry's bed next to James, facing her parents who had begun to nod off in their chairs. Hermione sighed, suddenly feeling weak, and placed a hand to her head, wrapping her other arm, instinctively and protectively, around her slightly distended abdomen. Lily's eyes flickered over the girl absently as she sensed the sudden movement. They scanned down from her forehead, to the arm wrapped around her stomach, then widened in sudden realization.

"It's Harry's baby..." She whispered faintly.

"What?" James head snapped up as he murmured the word.

Hermione looked up at Lily slowly, a small twinge of fear in her eyes as they flickered between her and James. Her own parents were sitting in the chairs opposite Harry's bed, leaning against each other fast asleep. She hadn't been prepared for this. Telling Harry's parents she was pregnant with his child before even telling him was not something she wished to do. Harry and Hermione, In a perfect world they would have been a united force when they announced the news. Smiling, happy, excited, it wouldn't have been like this. Never like this...

Hermione nodded slowly, not taking her eyes off Lily's face, waiting for the imminent flicker of disappointment to shoot across her face as it had done with her own parents. It didn't come. Lily merely nodded in return, stroking Harry's hair gently as she thought. James looked at her with something that resembled mingled sympathy and

understanding. He smiled softly at Hermione, but she could tell that he was concerned.

"Why?... How?..." Lily asked slowly, turning to Hermione.

Hermione took a deep breath and let it slide out again before she spoke. She realized before they asked that she would be required to give an explanation, however, finding the words for such a job was another story entirely. They came to her slowly, and quietly, but they were completely honest.

"It was right after Sirius... Sirius died. Harry was distraught..."

James nodded slowly. "Of course." He said quietly.

"He'd shut himself away in his dormitory. I was worried about him, Dumbledore had taken him straight to his office and when he came out he was even more distraught than before. He didn't say a word... He just went straight for his room. I went to check on him... I've never seen... I mean I had never seen anyone so broken as he was that night."

"And he has no idea?" Lily asked softly.

Hermione shook her head. "No... None at all. I was on my way to tell him when the wards collapsed at Privet Drive..."

"Seven weeks?" Lily inquired to confirm the age of the baby.

"Roughly, yes." Hermione said quietly. "It was almost seven weeks ago that Sirius died..."

A small silence followed this proclamation, but it was not long before James broke it down.

"Do you know if it's a boy or a girl?" He asked curiously.

"No..." Hermione said slightly disappointed, as she desperately wanted to know herself, "But... I think... I think it's a boy. I just have this feeling..."

James then did something that surprised Hermione greatly. He smiled. It wasn't just a weak, half hearted smile, it was a full blown grin. Hermione found herself again struck by the powerful similarities in James and Harry's appearances. They couldn't look anymore alike if they had tried. She found herself wondering if her son would possess the same handsome qualities as its father and grandfather.

"Lily had the same feeling. All the way through her pregnancy with Harry... she was so convinced he would be a boy... I was starting to get worried that she would be disappointed if he was a girl." James said with a sly grin.

"I would not have been disappointed." Lily said chidingly. "And besides, you should know by now that I'm never wrong about these things."

James gave Hermione a knowing smile.

"Yes dear." he replied to Lily in a well versed tone.

Hermione couldn't help but smile. It was obvious that despite all they had been through together that Lily and James Potter were as much in love as they had ever been. She did not know why, but the thought seemed to give her hope. Hope for Harry and herself...

What are you going to do? You still have school to think about, both of you." James asked her quietly, turning to face her.

"I – I don't know... I need to tell Harry... He needs to know..." Hermione stated, attempting not to betray her doubts.

"You're unsure of how he will react?" James voiced her fear.

Hermione suddenly could not find her voice, and settled on nodding nervously in reply.

James nodded with a frown.

"We weren't exactly... together when it happened." She said nervously.

James looked up. "But you love him... don't you?" he said with a knowing smile.

Hermione nodded, her eyes shining with tears . "Yes... I do..."

"But you are not sure if he feels the same way?" James again pinpointed her train of thought.

She nodded, becoming very interested in her fingernails.

James smiled, placing a hand on her shoulder. "I really don't think you have anything to worry about, Hermione ..."

"What do you mean?" She asked, looking up suddenly.

James gave a small laugh. "Every conscious moment he has had he's been calling your name."

"The only person he's been asking for is you, Hermione ... and he's not even entirely conscious in those moments... Surely that tells you something." Lily said softly.

A small, relieved smile crept over Hermione's face. However, as suddenly as it came, it disappeared and was replaced with a fresh look of concern.

"What if the baby changes how he feels about me?" She asked, slightly panicky.

Lily and James both seemed to frown in unison as they looked at her, trying not to reveal their own fears. They gave each other fleeting glances which told Hermione, despite their best efforts, that they were just as concerned about this as she was.

"I guess we'll just have to wait and see how he reacts, Hermione. If anyone knows how he will react, it will be you. I haven't known my son in nearly fifteen years..." James said quietly, trailing off into overwhelming sadness as the realization of his last statement hit him.

"You have a lot to take into consideration, Hermione." Lily said softly. "There's school... You're both so young... You're going to need as much help as you can get."

"We'll figure something out... Once Harry is awake we'll figure something out." Hermione said hesitantly, "I realize things will have to change..."

"You're a bright girl Hermione," Lily said with a small sigh, looking up from her son, "But I can't help but feel that you are being slightly naïve about this. This child will change everything. This child will change your world, yours and Harry's."

Hermione nodded, furiously fighting back unshed tears. "We can make this work..." She said shakily, "We can do this... I won't give up my baby."

Lily nodded slowly.

"Hermione," She began quietly, " I don't know how Harry is going to take all of this. I don't know how he will react to discovering that James and I have been alive all this time. Even once the circumstances have been explained... he may never forgive us. If he does, it may take a long time before he wants us around. But no matter what happens... James and I would never let you go through this alone, either of you. We will help you as much as we can... as much as Harry will allow us too."

James nodded in agreement, giving Hermione a bracing smile. "We will always be here for you, no matter what happens."

Hermione smiled gratefully, her eyes shining. "What happened wasn't your fault... Harry will see that..."

"I hope so, Hermione." James said grimly, "But even so, forgiveness is a lot to ask for... Many lives have been destroyed because of this..."

"Dumbledore will be made to answer for them all..." Lily said quietly.

"I'm glad I didn't tell him I was pregnant now." Hermione said quietly, with a hint of fear, "It seems all Dumbledore has ever done is try to remove the ones closest to Harry from his life..."

"I think you would be wise to keep the pregnancy a secret from him for as long as possible." Lily warned.

Hermione looked up at Lily in surprise, could she mean what Hermione thought she meant?. Hermione looked into her eyes, glittering, green eyes filled to the brim with inner fear and concern. Hermione found the meaning in them severely alarming, her own amber brown eyes flickered warily.

"Surely you don't think he would come after me?"

"I don't know what to think, Hermione." Lily said in concern. "A week ago, I would never have doubted Albus Dumbledore... But now? He's a dangerous man, Hermione. Dangerous because he appears so innocent. I hate to say this, but, I fear for you and the safety of your child... Harry's child..."

Now that she thought about it, Hermione knew that Lily had every reason to believe Dumbledore would hurt Hermione. He had successfully removed all caring family and friends of family from the boy by the age of one. What would stop him removing any newfound family and friends? Hermione saw it very clearly; she was in danger. Her baby was in danger. She knew that being involved with Harry put her in harms way of Voldemort, and the Death Eaters for that matter, but never had she believed she would be in danger from the leader of the side of righteousness. Somehow, knowing that Dumbledore was a threat to her and her child, put more fear into her heart than Voldemort's threat ever could.

"I won't ever let him hurt Harry ever again. Not Harry, not you, or your child." James said darkly, "I promise you Hermione, he will never interfere with your lives the way he has ours..."

"I can't believe this is happening..." Hermione said, sinking into the harshness of reality so swiftly she could feel it drowning her.

"We have all been mislead." James said quietly, "Dumbledore has brainwashed us all. But things are in motion now that Dumbledore has no power over, the truth has been revealed."

"I still don't understand how Harry got here... How did he find us when he doesn't even know we're alive?" Lily asked aloud, breaking off onto a tangent.

Hermione too, had been desperately wondering how Harry had come to be in the Potter's living room. She could find no logical explanation for the phenomena. All she could think of was Dumbledore's first theories as to what had happened to Harry upon arriving in Privet Drive. The wards had been forced to break by the power of Harry's magic breaking free. Had his magic instinctively taken him to his parents? It didn't seem possible. How could his magic take him to his parents when he consciously knew, or thought he knew, that his parents were dead?

"I think I have an idea..." James cut into her thoughts suddenly, fishing around in his pocket.

"Dumbledore had a theory..." Hermione said watching James curiously, "He said that he suspected that Harry's magic apparated him out of the house when it forced its way out of his body, taking him somewhere safe... or that he came in contact with a port key without knowing it."

"I believe," James said with an unmistakable bitterness, "That the old bastard was actually right for once."

Hermione looked at him in surprise. "What? Why?" she asked sharply.

"Because," He said with a small smile, withdrawing something small from his pocket. "He had this around his neck."

As he opened his closed fist Hermione recognized Harry's ring, the Potter family Ring, sitting on the palm of James' hand. It was blood stained and dirty, but its stone still gleamed defiantly out from the silver. The engravings that were still visible through the crusted blood confirmed to James what he had already guessed. Harry had retrieved the Ring from the vault as he had intended.

"Good Evening, Mr. Potter. Lovely to see you again, Sir." Griphook said warmly greeting his client.

"Evening Griphook, I have some urgent business I'd like you to see too." James said looking around carefully.

Griphook was always delighted to see James Potter striding into Gringotts. The Potter's were his wealthiest clients, and, much to his delight, one of the wealthiest clients that the wizarding bank possessed. This of course, raised his prestige with the company, and he was now one of the most respected managers in the banks many branches. Securing a client with the caliber of the Potter's was his highest, and most well recognized, personal achievement.

But something troubled the young Goblin about James Potter this day. There was an air of urgency in the way he presented himself. He was drawn, and tired looking, the bags under his eyes could have held ten galleons each. Not only did he look thoroughly exhausted, he looked nervous. His eyes were darting about him suspiciously, as if suspecting some sudden onslaught. Griphook raised an eyebrow, thinking over this bizarre behavior.

"Is everything alright, Mr. Potter?" Griphook asked cautiously.

"What?" James snapped, his eyes darting back to the Goblin before him, "Yes, yes... Fine Griphook. But if you don't mind I'm in a hurry..."

"Of Course, Mr. Potter..." Griphook said, giving a low bow, looking slightly perplexed but masking his curiosity well. "Right this way..."

"Thank you." James said firmly, striding swiftly towards his bank manager's now familiar office.

James turned abruptly into the smaller, narrower corridor that he had become accustomed to walking to on every visit to the bank. The young Goblin behind him had to hobble furiously just to keep up with the frantic man in front of him. As the single heavy wooden door loomed up before him, James pulled on the heavy brass knocker and heaved the door open, the wood grating against the cold stone floors loudly and echoing all the way down the hallways. Griphook finally

caught up to James and managed to squeak through the door barely before it shut with a resounding boom.

James seated himself on one of the two dangerously rickety chairs and placed a wooden box before him on Griphook's heavy wooden desk. As the little Goblin panted heavily around the corner of the desk and plopped himself down in his seat, he eyes James with a somewhat peculiar expression. One that said something of cruelty to Goblins. James ignored it and motioned pointedly to the wooden box.

Griphook eyed it hopefully, imagining what riches lay within to increase his employee bonus this month.

"This is for my son, Harry." James said swiftly. There was an edgy sadness in his voice.

"I see..." Griphook replied cautiously.

The truth was, he did not see at all, he was thoroughly confused by his clients behavior and had no idea what was going on. James had obviously gathered this from the Goblin's vacant expression, so he proceeded to explain in a hurried manor.

"I want it to be kept here, for safe keeping. If anything should happen... to my wife and I, I want you to present this to Harry when he arrives before the start of school. No one else, Griphook. It must go to Harry. I also wish to make him the sole heir of my fortune. All my vaults, Griphook. Do you understand what I am asking?"

"I shall place it in your personal vault immediately, Sir." Griphook said with an obliging smile, reaching for the box.

"No!" James shouted, causing the Goblin to jump back in fright. "I- I'm sorry Griphook. I don't want this placed in the vault... I want you to hang onto it. Keep it with you. Keep it until Harry arrives... Please Griphook, do me this final favor. Keep it safe..."

Griphook frowned, eyeing the box suspiciously. "I assure you Mr. Potter our vaults are very secure..."

"I understand that, Griphook, you have never let me down thus far. But please, I beg you, keep this out of the vaults." James said, his eyes shining with determination.

"What's in it?" Griphook asked suspiciously.

"Family heirlooms..." James said evasively. *"And my final will and testimony. If... If it comes to it, Griphook... I request that you hand this will over to Albus Dumbledore. He will come to collect it if the time arises. It holds details of what should become of Harry, if we ever were too..."*

"I understand Sir, But family heirlooms? Do you fear someone may attempt to break into your vaults?" Griphook asked uncertainly.

"Anything is possible..." James said, looking around cautiously. *"Please Griphook, I need Harry to have these things, It's important... It's... I need him to get these things... So he knows... So he knows that we did this for him. There is a letter in the box for Harry... Make sure he gets it will you?"*

"Mr. Potter, we can increase security on your vaults if you fear someone may attempt to break in..."

"That won't be necessary Griphook." James said firmly, *"Just hold onto this for me will you."*

Griphook gently pulled the box towards himself and slowly lifted the lid under James saddened gaze. Inside he saw the velvet box contained two parchment rolls. One, addressed to Harry J. Potter, the other labeled as 'The Final Will and Testimony of James and Lily Potter'. Beneath them sat a strange liquid like material, and a small ring box. Griphook was at a loss, obviously these items held incredible personal meaning to James and Lily, but he could not understand the urgency behind James request.

"It's my family ring." James said quietly, *"I want him to have it. And the other, well, you know what that is."*

Griphook nodded slowly. He was very familiar with invisibility cloaks, he had had several idiotic wizards attempt to rob the bank wearing such devices. Foolish, foolish beings...

"Mr. Potter?" He asked, looking up slowly.

"Hmm?" James replied absently, his eyes flickering over the contents of the box.

"Are you in some kind of trouble?" The goblin said slowly.

James looked up into the Goblin's eyes slowly, his trusted advisor and financial manager. His eyes flickered with a small laugh. He knew he wasn't supposed to tell anyone, but he couldn't keep it a secret anymore. The secret on its own was wearing him down.

"Voldemort is after us." James breathed, causing the Goblin to flinch at the Dark Wizard's name.

James got to his feet, casting one last glance to the box before his eyes fell on Griphook. "Give this to my son. My trusted friend, Do me this one last favor..."

As the Goblin nodded, he closed the box and placed it in the draw of his desk, locking it in. "As you wish, Mr. Potter... Although I hope it does not come to that..."

James smiled weakly at the Goblin. "Farewell..." he said, and his footsteps echoed out of the room. As the door grated shut behind him, Griphook came to the realization that that would be the last time he ever saw James Potter. Voldemort always got his man...

"You had me remove it almost instantly, remember Lil? I took it off his neck, and I never gave it a second thought... I just shoved it in my pocket. I never even thought to examine it, It never crossed my mind that that could have been the means he used to get here. His magic must have activated it somehow..."

Lily moved closer to examine the ring in surprise. "Of course... So simple... He would have had no idea..."

"But..." Hermione interjected, "He's had that ring for years. As long as I've known him... He said he got it from Gringotts at the beginning of first year when Hagrid took him to his vault. Why wouldn't it have worked before now?"

"I can't answer that, I'm afraid. But it's the only reasonable explanation we have." James replied grimly. "There is no other way he could have found us... If only I had given it a second glance... maybe then I would have realized it was Harry..."

"He loved that ring." Hermione said quietly. "He said it felt like he was carrying you around with him all the time, even though you were gone, you were with him. That's what he said..."

James smiled, standing up and walking over to Harry's head, carefully placing the chain back around his neck. Polishing the blood off its surface he placed the ring carefully down on his son's bare chest that was rising and falling slowly. The garnet shone brightly with the movement, and in that moment, Lily could see that James was as much in love with his son as the day he was when he was born. He held the same devotional stare, Hermione noticed the connection between them as well.

"Has he been happy?" James blurted out suddenly, causing Hermione to jump.

"Happy?" She repeated.

"His whole life has been based on lies... has he ever been happy?" James asked again, in a small voice.

Hermione smiled, thinking back over Harry's time with her.

"Going to Hogwarts made him happy." She said smiling, "He really is the most powerful wizard in our year. I think his life really started, when he found out he was a wizard..."

"I knew he would love Hogwarts.." Lily said smiling.

"He loves Quidditch too." She added, remembering that James used to play.

"Does he play?" James asked keenly.

"Seeker." Hermione said with a grin. "Youngest Gryffindor Seeker in half a century. He was a natural, the first time he picked up a broom he was put on the team."

James laughed and Lily made a clucking noise with her tongue. "Typical Potter..." She said, but a sly smile crept over her face.

"He was so excited when he found out that you had played." Hermione said to James.

James smiled, "The best part of school was the Quidditch." He said in a way that reminded Hermione of Harry, but after receiving a nudge in the ribs that knocked the air out of him, James corrected himself "Except for the parts with you, Dear... Obviously..."

Lily gave Hermione a mischievous smile then resumed her attentions on Harry.

"He even created his own broomstick in third year, not that it was very successful, but he spent nearly a whole year building that thing..."

"He engineered a broomstick?" James asked in surprise, "That's very advanced magic."

Hermione grinned. "I know, like I said, the most powerful student in our year. Except that he broke a leg, an arm, several rib bones and his pelvis during the maiden flight..." she added with a frown. "I gave him hell over that little expedition..."

James roared with laughter. "He crashed it? I bet he was mortified..."

"No, he didn't crash it, he abandoned ship mid flight." Hermione said her frown increasing as James laughed even louder.

"I wish I could have seen that..." James said wiping tears of laughter from the corners of his eyes.

"He could have killed himself." Hermione said, slightly shocked.

"Potter's are pretty thick skinned, Hermione." James said with a small smile, seeing her disapproving look.

"Thick headed too, by the sounds of things that's been passed down through the genes..." Lily muttered under her breath.

Hermione grinned. "It really was quite an amazing piece of work though. Harry was always very good at sensing magic. He sensed the spells on his old broom, a Nimbus 2001. He based his breaking charms off of that type of broom, but the acceleration charms were of his own design."

"He designed his own acceleration charms?" James asked in amazement.

Hermione nodded. "Harry is a lot smarter than he ever lets on to anybody. He's very reserved about his abilities, but sensing magic is a particular skill of his. Everyone thinks I'm the smart one, Harry is amazing."

James grinned. "So? What happened with the broom?"

"Well, when he went to take the test flight, he discovered the the braking charms weren't strong enough to stand up to his acceleration charms, which were more powerful than the Nimbus'. So, when he went to brake he had to abandon ship. The brooms probably still zooming half way around the world. He named it the Aurora. I could have killed him for trying to fly it without making sure it was safe first though."

James grinned. "Well, at least he learned from his mistake."

Hermione grimaced. "Yes, that was a high point I suppose, but it didn't stop him from inventing other crazy things. Not long after that Sirius sent him a Firebolt though, so I think that stopped him messing about with inventing brooms at least."

James grinned. "Sirius probably saved his life there by the sounds of things."

"Oh I'd believe it if I were you. I'll never forget the time I came in and found him walking on the ceiling of the Common room though. Anti-gravity belts." She said with a sigh. "It all went well until they were banned. Some first year ended up half way across Britain because he couldn't latch himself onto anything..."

"The ceiling?" Lily repeated faintly.

"He just looked down at me serenely as if it were the most normal thing in the world. 'Oh, Hello Hermione...' he said." Hermione said in an exasperated voice.

James grinned. "Sounds like he's very intelligent like his mother."

"And a new breed of Marauder like his father..." Lily said rolling her eyes.

"I bet Sirius loved having Harry around..." James said quietly.

"Oh he did. Those two were impossible together." Hermione said with a small laugh as she remembered what Harry and Sirius were like when they were in the same room, creating more trouble than they were worth.

Hermione, Ginny and Molly started as a loud crashing came from the room above the kitchen at Number 12 Grimwauld Place.

"What the?.. " Hermione muttered under her breath.

Another loud bang shook the house so violently it caused a shower of dust to fall down over the three girls at the table. Hermione cast a wary glance from Mrs. Weasley, to Ginny, then to the ceiling. A series of bangs and stomps followed. Mrs. Weasley jumped to her feet and pulled out her wand, followed closely by Hermione and Ginny. Silently giving them a knowing look, they nodded and pushed open the kitchen door slowly, tip toeing to the staircase.

Together they walked slowly up the stairs, sneaking past the portrait of Sirius' mother, surprised that she wasn't already wailing from the racket. At last they reached the door of the living room. The bangs and crashes were much louder here, echoing through the whole house making it creak and groan.

"Stay behind me" Muttered Mrs. Weasley urgently.

The two younger girls nodded, slightly frightened as she flung the door to the living room open.

"You'll never take me alive!" Shouted Harry in a girly voice.

"Mwa hahaha! Surrender yourself to the master!" Sirius roared in a deep booming voice.

Hermione's jaw dropped as she watched Sirius and Harry come into view. They were bouncing around the room quite literally, off the walls, off the ceiling. Obviously they had put a bouncing charm on themselves, as a means to create havoc. Hermione's jaw dropped further as they proceeded to catapult stationary objects at each other as if in mortal battle.

"NEVER!" Shouted Harry again "You Pansy!", he flung a lampshade across the room that narrowly missed Sirius' head and smashed on the wall.

Sirius backflipped in mid air and sprung off the roof, floating through the air.

"I will defeat you!" Sirius yelled defiantly.

He then proceeded to lift Kreacher off the floor with a levitation spell and hurled him, screaming, at Harry who burst into fits of laughter. Unable to prevent the inevitable, he took a blow straight to the stomach and was knocked out of the air, landing on the wooden floor with a thud. Dazed, Harry looked up to see Molly, Hermione and Ginny looking down at him disapprovingly. Sirius, alerted to their presence, hurried to the floor. Waving his wand hand he fixed all the broken objects, all the while smiling innocently.

"Molly! Ginny... Hermione... what a pleasant surprise... Just helping Harry with his homework... you know..."

"I see.." Molly said in silent fury.

Sirius sensing the danger signs grabbed Harry by his collar and pulled him to his feet.

"Such a lovely day outside Harry... Lets go finish up that homework out on the back lawn..." he said hastily.

"The back lawn? Good idea..." Harry said as they disappeared swiftly out the door, and with that they took off down the stairs laughing hysterically, knowing full well that there was no back lawn to save them from the wrath of Molly Weasley.

"Bloody Sirius ..." James said with an appreciative grin, "Hasn't changed..."

"Unfortunately." Lily said with a small smirk. "If he's turned our son into a mini Sirius, I won't be impressed..."

Hermione grinned. "That's not all. They quite often enjoyed passing their time by goading Remus."

James grinned. "Poor Remus."

Pounding footsteps flew down the stairs and the kitchen door exploded open as Harry and Sirius rushed in. Sitting down hastily they arranged their faces in the most innocent looks they could muster. Hermione, who had been sitting at the table reading the mornings Daily Prophet, looked up and raised an eyebrow in suspicion.

"What did you do?" Hermione asked warily.

"Shhh!" Sirius silenced her.

Hermione shrugged, shuffling her paper and resumed her reading. A few seconds later, more steps could be heard and the kitchen door again swung open to reveal Remus. But not Remus as he normally was, oh no, this Remus sported a lovely head of shocking green and silver hair. Remus looked over the innocent looking culprits, and casually walked into the kitchen, sitting down at the table across from them calmly.

"Oh Padfoot?" Remus said casually.

"Yes, Remus?" Sirius replied, trying to keep a straight face, his eyes shining with laughter.

"Do you have any idea how I came to have green hair?" he inquired.

"Um... No, sorry Mooney I'm afraid I can't help you..." Sirius replied, pretending to rack his brains.

"Prongslet?" Remus asked, turning his attentions on Harry.

"Huh? Oh what was that? Um... Remus, what happened to your hair?" Harry asked giving Remus an odd look.

"Nice try Prongslet." Remus said sternly.

"What? what do you mean, Moony?" Harry said in feigned ignorance. He pouted. "I didn't do anything Mooney."

"OK... I believe you little Prongs." Remus said finally, "It's OK I trust you had nothing to do with it... But your godfather on the other hand..."

Remus shot Sirius a dark glare as Harry turned to Sirius, a triumphant smirk gracing his face.

"Wait..." Sirius began, dumbfounded. "How? How did you get out of that!" he demanded.

"I'm Prongslet, Paddie..." Harry reminded him, "I can never do wrong..."

"I think Remus might just suit green and silver hair, you know..." James said, trying to picture it in his mind.

Lily smiled. "Poor Remus, I bet he got his revenge though..."

Hermione laughed. "I'm sure he did."

She didn't notice, but Harry had begun to stir as she spoke.

"You said the Order interrogated you... Did ... Did Remus have a part in that?" James asked slowly.

Hermione sighed. "Yes, a small part."

James nodded in disappointment.

"You have to understand, he feels like he is all Harry has left now, and when Harry vanished... He felt as though he had failed to protect him... He took it hard... He's very protective of Harry... Very concerned about him... I don't blame Remus for questioning me. He was only doing what Dumbledore instructed him to do. He's just as fooled by the old man as we all were... And he has a history with friends betraying friends..." She said quietly.

James looked up into her dark amber eyes and smiled. "You are wise beyond your years, Hermione Granger." He said warmly.

Hermione smiled sheepishly and was about to reply when she noticed that something had distracted James. His eyes were suddenly wide with surprise. He had been holding Harry's hand in his own, when he had felt it squeeze his tightly. James looked hastily at Lily, who looked to Harry's face in surprise. Hermione looked from James' eyes to his hand slowly, and saw that Harry was gripping it tightly. Gasping, she looked up at his face quickly to see that he was grimacing.

"Her... Hermione?" His dry voice crackled out of his parched throat.

"Harry?..." She asked, tentatively.

"Hermione.." He said again, his raspy voice sounding slightly more audible.

"Oh Harry!" She cried, launching herself at his chest, causing her own mother and father to wake suddenly with her loud cry.

As her body impacted against his Harry let out a low hiss of agony. Realizing what she had done, she went to leap back as if electrified, only to discover that Harry had wrapped his arms around her waist, holding her to his chest. The act had obviously caused him much pain, as his face contorted in anguish. She had not realized she was crying until she felt a tear splatter onto his bare chest. With a sudden sob, Hermione threw her arms around his neck as he leaned up, burying her head into his shoulder.

Julia and Jonathan had half risen from their seats, looking up at the boy in surprise. James stepped back from Harry's bed as the boy released his hand. Pulling Lily to his side he clutched her tightly in his arms as they watched their son awaken.

"He'll be alright now, Lil... He'll be alright now..." He whispered softly into her ear as he wrapped his arms around her, clutching her tightly to his body.

Lily nodded, silent tears of exhaustion streaming down her face. James kissed her forehead softly and held her close, watching Harry hug Hermione.

As her bushy brown hair fell across his face Harry breathed her in heavily. Her tears were now rolling over the bare skin of his shoulder and trickling slowly across the rows of slashes on his back. They stung painfully, but Harry did not allow it to consume him. Hermione was sobbing heavily against his chest, he could feel her chest moving in and out in painful jerks. He smiled painfully, moving a hand slowly down the back of her soft hair.

"Parchment and Ink..." He said softly, breathing in her scent slowly as he wrapped his arms tighter around her waist. "Hello, Hermione..."

Chapter Eleven: What Do You See When You Close Your Eyes?

Beta Reader: PK Fan

"Two muggles and Two Wizards... Your parents are here I presume?" Harry asked Hermione quietly, his words coming in sharp gasps.

Hermione leaned back from their embrace to look upon Harry's face, expecting to see his eyes open and completely whole. However, when she looked at his face, his eyes were still swollen shut, purple and puffy, just as they always had been. Hermione frowned, glancing toward her parents, who were still half risen from their chairs in curiosity, to Lily and James, who were eyeing Harry in silent joy.

"Yes, they're here..." She said hesitantly. "Harry... can you see?"

"No." Harry said grimly, and Hermione despaired. Then Harry began to speak again, though he was obviously in great pain, "But I can see something... or sense something... I believe that I can see Magic..."

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked, perplexed.

"I can't explain it, Hermione. But... Every person seems to give off an aura of light that represents their magic... Muggles are very faint... Wizards glow..."

"Glow..." Hermione repeated in surprise.

"Hermione ..." Harry suddenly interjected, "What happened? Where am I?"

Hermione hesitated. She had been yearning and dreading this question at the exact same time. She knew it would come, yet no matter how much she thought it through, there was never going to be an easy way to break this news to Harry. She was torn. To tell him the truth immediately might push him over the edge, cause him to stress out and become more unwell. But delaying the truth would do more harm than good, because Harry was about to discover that for his whole life, the truth had been delayed, and fabricated. Hermione couldn't bare to add to the lies.

"Well... That's a long story." Hermione started slowly, "But you're safe here."

"The last thing I remember..." Harry struggled to recall, "Was a huge dome of light, shattering..."

"Yes." Hermione verified, "That was the anti Port key and anti apparition wards being destroyed. That dome of light was all the protection measures Dumbledore had placed over Privet Drive being destroyed."

"Voldemort?" Harry asked in surprise.

"No Harry..." Hermione said quietly. "You."

"Me?" Harry repeated in surprise. "What? You think that I broke through the wards? Hermione, I was beaten to an inch of my life... and besides... Dumbledore bound my magic."

"I know... Your Aunt told me..." Hermione mumbled quietly, then feeling him flinch in surprise, she began to explain. "I arrived at Privet Drive just as the wards went down. I rushed up to your room to make sure you were OK... But when I reached your room it was empty... you were gone..."

"I remember feeling strange... Like... Like I was using a Port Key..." Harry recollects.

Hermione glanced at Lily and James then quickly looked back to Harry. "That was one of Dumbledore's theories... He said that it was most likely that your magic had broken free of its bonds in an attempt to move you somewhere safe and away from harm. Your magic broke down the wards because you needed help."

"My magic broke free..." Harry repeated slowly, remembering Myrddin's words. "Yes... Yes... that's what he told me..."

"What?" Hermione asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Nothing... Dumbledore? He was there as well?" Harry asked curiously, changing the subject.

"I sent Hedwig to him as soon as I could think straight... I nearly died when I saw your room Harry... So much blood... I was sure that he had killed you..." Hermione said, her voice quivering under the weight of the memory.

"I'm sorry I scared you 'mione..." He said softly.

"It's OK, I'm just glad you're alright..." Hermione said gently, brushing a strand of hair back off of his forehead, he grimaced in pain as his face broke into a smile.

"Dumbledore thought that I had been port keyed out?" Harry pried.

"Or disapparated... Those were his original theories..." Hermione tried to keep the bitterness out of her voice, but was unsuccessful.

"Original? He changed his mind?" He asked.

"He lead me to believe that he thought your magic had taken you to a safe place, which turned out to be the truth. But really, he suspected foul play. He suspected me." Hermione said bitterly.

"What?" Harry spluttered in disbelief. "What do you mean?"

"He took me to Order Headquarters to fill in the order on what had happened, so they could 'help' us find you. He briefed them without me in the room, while I told Ron what had happened... When they called for me, they tried to slip me Veritaserum to coax a confession out of me. They accused me of selling you out to Voldemort." Hermione said slowly.

"What?" Harry said in outrage. "Dumbledore accused you of selling me to Voldemort? What the hell was he thinking?"

"He made the Order interrogate me for days. They were only acting on his orders, no doubt he had them brainwashed like he's had us brainwashed for years." She spat angrily.

"Why would he do that?" Harry asked in disgust.

"They said me being at your house at the exact time the wards went down was suspicious." Hermione said with a sigh.

"Even so, they should have known better!" Harry said angrily, becoming agitated. "If anyone was suspicious it would be my Uncle! The guy who tried to beat me to death as slowly and painfully as possible..."

Harry was cut off suddenly by a sharp sob of a woman in the room, and it wasn't Hermione. As he began to wonder exactly who the two wizards in the room were, Hermione cut through his thoughts.

"Calm down, Harry..." Hermione said softly. "It doesn't matter now... Not now that you're OK."

"You said my magic took me somewhere safe..." Harry said after several moments of cooling off. "Where? And how?"

"You appeared here, in the living room of this house, seven days ago." Hermione said quietly, "Luckily for you, this woman is a healer, she's been working on you non stop for the past week. She sought me out with Hedwig, who somehow managed to find you here..."

"Is Hedwig alright?" Harry asked suddenly.

"She's doing much better now, Harry." Hermione said with a smile.

"Good. How long have you been here Hermione?"

"I only just arrived tonight. L – The Healer brought me here once we had met, I was desperate to make sure you were alright."

Harry snorted, "That's odd, I would have thought Dumbledore would have had me removed to somewhere where I could be under his constant supervision and control. What's the matter with him, is he losing his touch?"

"Actually..." Hermione began hesitantly. "He still doesn't know I've found you... Or that you're alive. He has no idea where you are."

Harry attempted a painful grin. "He'll be pissed off then, I can just see him apparating around frantically trying to find any possible trace of me."

"It's no more than he deserves." A male voice growled from behind Hermione.

Harry was sure he recognized the voice, but for the life of him he could not place it. It seemed to stir something within his chest, something he could not explain. It gave him a feeling, one he had not felt since staying with Sirius at Grimmauld Place, a feeling of home. Just as he was about to ask whom it belonged to, Hermione cut him off.

"Well," She said stiffly, her voice was slightly quieter as if she had turned her head to look at someone else. "I'm sure you must have questions for the Healer about your injuries..."

"I'll gladly answer them for you, Harry..." The healer's voice came.

To Harry's surprise, the voice was shaky, as if she were upset about something. The only explanation he could think of for her apparent distress must have been the way he looked. Her voice too, seemed oddly familiar. Yet at the same time, it was as though he had not heard it for years. He struggled to think of who these people might be, to put a face to the voices, but even as he thought about it, the healer began to speak.

"You have sustained damage to over ninety percent of your body." Her voice wavered under the strain to keep it calm.

"Do I really look that bad?" He asked in a light hearted jab at himself, hoping to break the ice.

"No, but you're still pretty beat up, Harry..." Hermione said softly. "Because some of the wounds were left so long... Well it's made it harder to heal you..."

"I see..." He said quietly, "Well I definitely still feel like I've been smashed to a pulp."

"Your broken bones are almost all fully healed now. Your leg and your ribs were the main causes of concern, but they have begun to heal well. You will be slightly tender around the rib cage for perhaps another week at the most. Your leg will be painful to walk on for another two, I imagine." Lily continued shakily. "I have corrected the dislocated fingers of your right hand. They will be stiff and swollen for a while, but eventually the hand will be as good as new."

"You must have been busy..." Harry noted, wincing painfully as he shuffled in his bed. "What else?"

"Your back is still cut to ribbons, for some reason those lashes keep opening up if you move too quickly. They've been left open for weeks by the look of them. I'm afraid they will take some time to heal completely. I've never seen lashes that deep or to that extent..." Lily's voice trailed off painfully.

"You've done an amazing job so far." Harry said to her kindly, feeling pity for this woman who was obviously feeling bad that she couldn't miraculously make him well again. "I'm going to be fine, just wait and see."

The woman gave a small shuddering breath as if she were trying desperately not to burst into tears. She then forced herself to continue with her explanation, leaving Harry wondering.

"Your kneecap has been fully healed, but it's going to take some time to work out the stiffness. You will have to work on it gradually. It may take you some time before you can walk with ease again."

Harry nodded painfully.

"And... Your eyes..."

"Will I ever be able to see again?" He asked slowly, bracing himself for the worst case scenario.

Lily took a deep breath and began hesitantly. "At the moment, I am unable to be sure of the extent of the damage to your eyes... They remain swollen shut and I won't be able to examine them thoroughly until the swelling goes down... Then I will have more of an idea. It all

depends on whether the acid reached the nerves behind your eyes... If it hasn't, there is a chance that I can save your sight... If it has destroyed your nerves, then I'm afraid there's nothing I can do..."

Harry nodded silently. "I understand..."

"Like I said, Harry... We will know more when the swelling goes down. But if you can see light... Then I am very hopeful that we will be able to save your eyes... Or at least restore them." Lily said quietly, sensing the fear in the boy's words.

"So I'm doing well?" He asked quietly.

"Miraculously well considering the circumstances..." Lily said with a small smile as she looked upon him. "I just wish I could do more... And faster..."

"You have done more than your share already..." Harry said gently. "When do you think the swelling will be down enough to examine my eyes?"

"Within the next few days I hope." Lily replied, "I know this is a lot to take in..."

"You're not kidding." Harry said weakly, "How exactly *did* I get here? Was Dumbledore right? Did I apparate or use a portkey? And if so why out of everywhere in the world would I appear here- in the house of a stranger?"

The room went silent. No one knew how, or where to begin. Nobody wanted to upset Harry, but they knew they could not lie to him. It would only make matters worse the longer they delayed telling him the truth. Hermione glanced to Lily and James, as if asking their advice on what to say, Lily looked quite distressed now that the time had come. Hermione gave her a bracing smile then turned to James, who was staring at Harry in silent determination.

"You came into contact with a portkey, Harry." The familiar male voice said that he still could not place. "When your magic broke free it somehow activated its dormant power."

"What portkey?" Harry inquired. "How would I come into contact with a portkey at the Dursleys?"

"The ring you wear around your neck." James said hesitantly.

"My ring? But that's my family ring..." Harry said slowly.

"Yes, Harry... The Potter Family Ring..." James pressed.

"But why would it be a portkey?" Harry asked cautiously, a strange sensation welling up in his chest. "Where did it take me...? Surely if it had been made into a portkey, it would've taken me to Godric's Hollow..."

"No Harry, not Godric's Hollow... That was only a temporary residence..." James said quietly.

"It brought you here... To us, Harry." The familiar woman's voice said quietly.

"I don't understand..." Harry said anxiously, "It brought me where?"

"To the Potter family home..."

Harry lay in stunned silence. His family ring had taken him to a property he did not know existed; a property owned by his family. He was sitting in his parents' house. Then he realized what the woman had said. *"It brought you here... to us."*

"Who are you?" he demanded anxiously.

"Dumbledore's betrayals run deeper than you know..." The man's voice came again. It was laced with bitterness, anger, and sadness. "He has lead you to believe that the two people closest to you have been dead for 15 years... Just like he lead us to believe that you were dead..."

"Are... are you saying..." Harry began hesitantly, "That you're my parents?"

"Yes Harry..." Lily said choking on the rising lump in her throat. "We are your parents..."

Harry couldn't breathe. He was sure that for several fleeting moments his heart had actually stopped beating. He felt dizzy, and he was sure that if he could actually see the room about him it would be spinning. Alive? For as long as he could remember, all he had ever wished for was for his parents to walk through the door one day and explain to him that it had all been a big mistake. That they were alive, and were here to take care of him. To whisk him away from his life at the Dursley's. To show him of a new life; a life with his parents.

Had what they said been true? Had Dumbledore deceived them all, all these long fifteen years? Harry felt sick to his stomach just thinking about all the times Dumbledore had talked with him about his grief over his parents' deaths. All the words about how he was so much like his dead father. How he had his dead mother's eyes. Such a shame.. He had said. Such a shame. Harry's breathing increased rapidly with his anger.

"Mum?" He said faintly, his breathing becoming so rapid his words were gasps. "Dad?"

"Harry... I know you will be shocked..." James said quickly, "We were too..."

"He told me Voldemort killed you..." Harry said in disbelief.

"He very nearly did..." James said grimly, "But in the end, he was only interested in killing you, Harry... We struggled, but he managed to throw us out of the way. Before we could attack again there was an explosion and we both got knocked out... When we came to... you were gone."

"Dumbledore took me- he took me to the Dursleys..." Harry said, placing the pieces together.

"We went straight to him and told him what had happened..." James said angrily, tears forming in his eyes. "He told me he had moved your body from Godric's Hollow himself, That bastard told me you were dead. He looked into my eyes and told me you were dead..."

"Why? Why would he do this?" Harry asked in shock, "All these years... all these years he's lied to me."

"He's lied to us all Harry..." Hermione said quietly.

Harry fell silent. How could the man he had trusted above all others really be this evil? He found himself wondering how he had ever fallen for the old man's apparent wisdom. Obviously he was not the only one to be fooled by Albus Dumbledore. He felt used... Used and betrayed. How could one of the only men whom he thought had his best interests at heart have looked into his eyes and told him that his parents had died, when he knew they lived? Suddenly he thought of Sirius, and his heart went stone cold. His stomach lurched uncomfortably as the harsh truth hit him.

"Wait..." Harry said suddenly. "If he knew you were alive..."

"...Then he let Sirius rot in Azkaban knowing full well he was innocent? Yes, he did." James spat, finishing the sentence for him angrily.

"I- I don't understand..." Harry said in despair. "Why would he do this to me? Why would he tell me you were dead when he knew you were alive... Why would he leave Sirius to rot in Jail when he knew he was innocent? And why, why would he tell you I was dead?"

"I don't know about the first three, but I know exactly why he told us you were dead." James said bitterly.

"Why?" Harry asked sharply.

"To get us out of the way. He suggested that we should leave- to get away from the grief and pain," James replied in a growl, "Knowing that we would turn our backs on the Wizarding world and never come back. He told us everyone believed we were dead, he said it would be better for us to leave and look after each other rather than stay and fight in the war... He never told us Voldemort died trying to kill you. We thought the war was still going..."

"But that doesn't make sense... Why would he want you out of the way?" Harry asked, "Unless... Unless he wanted total control of me..."

"I've been thinking about this, over and over in my mind, and that is the only thing that I can think of Harry..." James said quietly. "He must have known we would never allow you to become a martyr. He knew that Sirius would not allow it either..."

"So he took care of everyone who would stand in his way... Sirius is dead..." Harry said quietly.

"I know son... Hermione told us... We had always intended for you to go to Sirius... Always... It was in the will we made... Dumbledore knew you were to go to Sirius..."

"So he had him locked up instead... And he put me with the only relatives I had that hated my guts..." Harry said bitterly.

"Harry, I promise you," James said desperately, "even if you cannot forgive Lily and I, I promise you, I will make Dumbledore answer for all of this. He will pay for what he has done."

"Can that wait until I'm well again? I'd like to be there... if you don't mind..." Harry said in a dark voice.

"Of course..." James replied slowly.

"Think rationally James!" Lily blurted out suddenly, "Dumbledore is dangerous! Now we know what he is capable of, you aren't going anywhere until we've thought all of this through."

"It's alright Lil... Everything will be alright, I promise..." James assured her as she sighed in despair.

"James, I think Hermione and her Parents should stay here..." Lily said changing the subject as she looked to Jonathan and Julia who were all very wide eyed and looking as though they felt out of place. "I fear for their safety... Who knows what lengths Dumbledore will go too to get to Harry..."

"I agree..." James said, frowning, "Hermione would not wish to leave Harry anyway, I think."

"No." Hermione said quickly, "I'd like to stay... as long as it's not an inconvenience to you both..."

James shook his head, standing up from Harry's bed, "None at all."

"Thank you." Hermione replied in relief.

"It's getting late, Lily and I will go sort out the guest rooms for you." James said with a small smile, before taking Lily by the shoulder's walking towards the door.

"Mum... Dad..." Harry said quickly.

James and Lily turned slowly to look upon Harry. Hermione could see, that through the sadness, James and Lily's eyes were shining at being addressed by Harry in such a way. She knew they were in pain, as Harry was, she could sense it in the air of the room, in their breathing, in their movements, and in their eyes. As they looked upon him she could see the hope radiating from their eyes.

"You said even if I could never forgive you..." Harry repeated James' words, "Well... the only reason I would have for not forgiving you... would be because you placed your trust in an old man, who I myself have trusted in ever since I met him... I too fell for his manipulations, his lies... How can I blame you for something I have done myself?"

James' mouth fell open in disbelief. "So- you're not angry?"

"Oh I'm angry.. With Dumbledore, I'm furious. With you... No." Harry said quietly, "But... I need some time to get used to this... All I've ever wanted is to have you both back with me... I just need some time to get used to having you in my life..."

James nodded. "I understand, Harry." He said gently. "This will be hard on all of us... We've been robbed of our lives together."

"I'll be OK, dad. Just give me some time..." Harry reassured him.

Harry heard his mother burst into an ecstatic sob and before he knew it he felt her launch herself onto him, giving him a gentle hug. He recognized her scent as well, a smell that reminded him of a long lost

childhood that he was robbed of at such a young age. His chest swelled as she embraced him, filled with overwhelming mixed emotions, anger, love, happiness, confusion. As she pulled away Harry attempted another painful smile, which he managed barely, before flinching in pain.

"We love you, Harry..." Lily said breathlessly as she stood up, "We've always loved you..."

"I know, mum..." Harry said quietly, "I know..."

"Come on Lil, It's getting late..." James pressed gently. "We'll check back on you a bit later Harry..."

Harry managed a nod as Lily brushed a piece of hair out of his face and stood, turning to James.

"Night Harry..." Lily said softly.

"Night..." Harry said quietly as Lily and James departed the room quietly, leaving Hermione and her parents at Harry's side.

"Are you alright, Hermione?" Harry asked gently.

"I'm better now that you're awake..." Hermione said hesitantly. "There's been so much to take in tonight..."

"You aren't kidding..." Harry said with a small sigh, "I can't believe Dumbledore was capable of all that he has done... How could I have been so blind?"

He felt Hermione tense up as he said these last words, and he mumbled apologetically to her. She squeezed his hand gently.

"Can you really see my magic?" She asked curiously.

"Yes, and mum and dad's as well. It's strange..."

"It's fascinating..." Hermione pointed out.

Harry grinned painfully. "You find everything fascinating... But I wouldn't get too excited yet.."

"Why?" Hermione asked with a frown.

"Because I don't think I've got it down perfectly just yet." He added as an after thought.

"Why not?" Hermione asked curiously.

"Because... I seem to have two magic sources emanating from you." Harry said casually.

"Oh..." Hermione gulped.

"Well..." Jonathan Granger said abruptly, "I think we'll just go downstairs and give you kids some space."

"Good idea..." Julia added in a strained voice, "I'm glad you're awake Harry dear..."

"Thank you Mrs. Granger.. I'm sorry we didn't get properly introduced tonight..."

"Not a problem dear, we'll have plenty of time for that..." Julia said, giving her daughter a wink.

Hermione made silent gestures of annoyance to her mother and father as Jonathan herded Julia out of the room. He gave Hermione one last knowing glare, telling her that it was now or never, then disappeared out of the door and closed it gently behind him. Hermione gulped and gave a nervous sigh. Harry, picking up on her stress felt around for her hand and squeezed it, his mind full of thoughts.

"What is it, 'Mione?" He asked seriously.

"Th- There's something I need to tell you Harry..." Hermione began hesitantly.

Harry nodded, shifting slightly in his bed. "Alright..?"

"I know this is probably the last thing you need to hear right now, after everything else you've just found out. But I can't keep it from you any longer, It wouldn't be fair." She began to babble.

"Hermione, you're rambling again..." He said with a light grin.

"I'm sorry..." She said quickly, "It's just... Do you remember what happened between us on the night... the night Sirius died?"

"Of course... Of course I do..." He said softly. "I'm sorry Hermione... I tried to write... You must have been thinking all kinds of things..."

"No... well yes... but no that's not what I mean..." She said shaking her head in frustration.

"What then?" Harry asked slowly.

Harry began to feel a sense of dread well up in his chest. Was she going to tell him that it had all been a huge mistake? That she did not love him, or want to be with him? Had she found someone else? Harry felt his heart beating hard and fearfully in his chest. No, she couldn't have... Sirius had convinced him that she was in love with him. It couldn't be that... It couldn't be... Harry's breath caught in his throat as he anticipated her answer.

"Harry, what I'm trying to say is... Your sense of being able to see magic isn't off... It's completely accurate... all it tells me is... our child is a wizard..." she said slowly, as a lead weight dropped in her stomach.

Harry jolted with shock. His body was electrified in surprise. "W- What? Our child?...Did you just say...?"

Hermione sighed and took a deep breath. "Yes... I'm pregnant Harry... I'm pregnant with your child..."

Chapter Twelve: Family Traits

"Wait a second..." Anna Granger said as she held up her finger commandingly, closing her eyes as she tried to get their words straight in her mind. "You're Harry's parents?"

She was standing in the living room of her parents' house facing two figures shrouded in hooded cloaks. She had been drawn to the area by a loud crack, and all the lights of the house going out. She had figured she had somehow managed to blow a fuse and cursed as she stumbled into the dark room. She had walked straight into James before her eyes had adjusted to the light, and let out a small unheard scream as a silencing charm hit her at the exact same moment. What followed was the most peculiar, hushed, not to mention rushed explanation Anna had ever encountered.

It involved Hermione and her parents staying a secret location where Harry was recovering. It involved asking her not to scream and apologizing for using the spell, explaining that it was a precautionary measure so that they would not draw attention to the house. This also included the black out. They informed her that they, Harry's parents, had come to collect her and bring her to safety, because she was no longer safe in her own home due to Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix. Once they were sure she was calm and would not attempt to scream, they removed the silencing spell and allowed her to speak for the first time.

"Yes." Lily said with a small smile.

"Impossible." Anna said folding her arms, "Hermione told me his parents died when he was a baby."

"Well..." Lily began.

"It's a long story." James assured her with a tired laugh.

Anna looked at them impatiently, raising an eyebrow as she tapped her foot.

"Everyone thought we were dead." James explained, giving into her apparent demands. "Just like we thought Harry was dead. See, Dumbledore..."

"Aha!" Anna said triumphantly. "I knew that old coot was dodgy. As soon as Hermione told me he suspected she was connected with Harry's disappearance..."

"Yes. Well..." James said with a frown. "He lead Harry to believe we were dead, and lead us to believe he was dead. The point is, we don't have much time."

"Is Harry alright?" Anna asked cautiously, in a softened tone.

"He's awake." Lily said with a grateful smile. "Hermione's with him now. We thought it best to come and collect you. Your parents and your sister will be staying with us from now on, and we believe it would be wise for you too as well. We fear that Dumbledore may resort to just about anything to get to Harry if he thinks you know something."

"What's Grandpa going to do? Interrogate me like he did Hermione?" Anna scoffed.

"He is responsible for the lengthy prison term my best friend endured for a crime he did not commit, and his subsequent death. Believe me, Miss Granger, there are far worse things that Albus Dumbledore could do to you than ask you a few threatening questions." James growled darkly.

"You – You think that he would kill me?" Anna asked in disbelief.

"That I cannot answer." James said grimly, "You stand in the way of him finding Harry, that makes you a threat, an obstacle. Who knows what lengths he would go too? You're not safe here, and neither are we."

"We have to leave, Dear." Lily said urgently to Anna, taking her by the shoulders. "We cannot risk being seen by any member of the Order or by Albus himself. We need time to prepare..."

Anna nodded in a daze. "I need to get my stuff."

"In that case you can show us to Hermione's room, there's a few things her parents suggested she might like to have." Lily said gently.

"Like what?" Anna asked suspiciously.

"Well, fresh clothes for a starter." James said in an agitated voice.
"And something of Harry's she has. A box apparently."

"Oh." Anna said sheepishly, "Well, of course. Follow me, her room is upstairs next to mine."

"Thank you Anna." Lily said, giving her husband a dark look as they followed the girl through the darkness and up the staircase.

"Is it really necessary for the lights to be out?" Anna asked angrily as she stubbed her toe for the third time on the top step of the staircase.

"I'm sorry but we really can't afford to be seen." Lily replied as Anna pointed them towards Hermione's open doorway.

"Fine." Anna sighed rolling her eyes. "If you need anything I'll be next-door, searching blindly for my wardrobe."

"Grateful child." James muttered when Anna was well out of earshot.

"Come on James." Lily nagged, pulling him into Hermione's room.
"The sooner we get out of here the better."

"Fine." James said with a sigh, "You get the clothes, I'll look for the box."

"Agreed." Lily said casually as she headed for the dark outline of Hermione's wardrobe.

James moved cautiously through the room, squinting as he attempted to adjust his vision to the dark room. Moving to his left he saw what appeared to be a vast bookshelf, towering to the ceiling and spanning the length of one of the walls. As he examined its contents he let out a low whistle, causing Lily to turn around and throw him a filthy look.

Taking a book from the crammed shelf he flicked through its pages casually.

"Boy, this girl sure likes to read, doesn't she?" He said with a grin.

"What's that supposed to mean, Potter." Lily snapped.

"Nothing." James backed off hastily, sensing the danger in his wife's voice. "I was just saying..."

"There's nothing wrong with reading, perhaps you should do a little yourself." Lily said indignantly as she turned back to her wardrobe.

"Yes..." James grumbled as he replaced the book with some difficulty.

"Yes what?" Lily barked.

"Yes Dear." James repeated.

"Hmmph." Lily replied in satisfaction as she withdrew several hangers of clothes.

Lily continued to rummage through Hermione's clothes for several minutes before she heard another peep out of James. Very wisely, he had decided to keep his mouth shut as he continued his search. In fact it was not until James came across a series of photo frames that he uttered any word at all. Within the frames three figures waved out at him, smiling happily as they shoved each other around. Two of them were definitely Hermione and Harry, but the other boy he did not recognize, he could only assume that this was the 'Ron' Hermione had mentioned. He had a shock of red hair and a pasty face covered in freckles.

"I think she has more photographs of Harry than we do." James said sadly.

Lily turned around slowly and sighed. "That's to be expected James. She's had five years with Harry, we only ever got one."

James went quiet, turning back to the bookshelf to resume his search. Lily seemed pleased with her selection of clothing for Hermione, and

went about trying to pack them into a magically conjured trunk. Lily frowned, seeing as there was still no sign of Anna emerging from her room, and hoped desperately that they would not be stuck waiting all night for the teenage girl to select her outfits for the coming weeks. Just as Lily closed the lid on the trunk in satisfaction, James voice came to her ears, and it was somewhat excited.

"Lily, come here and tell me what's written on this broom." James said with a wonder filled look in his eyes.

To Lily's dismay she saw what could only be Harry's box lying on the floor, opened. James was holding what looked to be a racing broom in his hands, stroking it fondly. Frowning, she walked over and squinted at the handle. The broom was sleek and smooth, coated in a glossy black paint that was polished immaculately. Every feature of the broom looked honed to perfection, the twigs perfectly clipped, the handle wonderfully shaped. Along the side of the handle at the tip of the broom the title was scrawled in silver paint that stood out vividly against the shining black.

"Aurora II" she said crossing her arms, waiting for him to notice her disapproving look. Suddenly what she had said dawned on her. "But..."

"He made another one..." James said in awe.

"Oh Merlin..." Lily muttered faintly.

"Would you look at this thing." James exclaimed in wonder. "I've never seen a broom like it. It's a masterpiece... My son built this. I mean Harry, my son built it."

"James, you're babbling" Lily scolded.

"Look at this Lily, look!" James repeated excitedly.

"Yes, James. I see it." Lily said in a bored voice. She never really grasped her husbands' love of brooms, and now that she had discovered Harry was the same way, she feared she was in for many of these boring conversations about broom speed and twig quality.

"No look! It's beautiful... A work of art, my son made this. It's perfect, check out the balance. I think I'm in love..."

"Yes Dear, so you've said about twenty times already." Lily replied.

"Look at it. I mean my son made this. My son. It's perfect. Look. Perfect build, the bristles are perfectly aligned for optimal flight... My son made this..." James continued to ramble much to Lily's despair.

James carefully placed the broom down on the floor of Hermione's bedroom and grinned with anticipation. He stood next to it and placed his right hand over the broom, grinning from ear to ear now as he muttered the magical word.

"Up!"

The Aurora came alive and flew into James open had so fast, so smoothly that he could not believe his eyes. The broom gently vibrated in his hand, as though trying to talk him into hopping on and taking it for a spin. It hummed gently as it hovered, a gentle, sweet, smooth sound to his ears, a sound that was nothing at all reminiscent of the brooms he flew back in his day. Lily's voice snapped him out of his trance.

"James." Lily scolded. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Look at this Lily. This thing is amazing!" James crooned.

"In case you had forgotten," Lily said harshly, crossing her arms even tighter across her chest in a menacing fashion. "Hermione said he nearly broke his neck on the first one."

"But this one is so much better..." James excused.

"How would you know, James? You never saw the last one!" Lily groaned in agitation.

"I just know." James said stroking its handle fondly.

"Have you not heard of privacy, James?" Lily snapped, changing tactics. "You can't just go digging around in Harry's things!"

"He wont mind," James said waving her off in a dismissive voice.
"Listen to it Lily, it almost purrs..."

"James Potter, put that damn thing back into the box right this minute!" Lily glowered.

"But Lily, listen to it. Look," he said extending it out to her, "Harry built this thing. Look at it."

"James..." Lily said in a threatening tone.

"Would you mind if I fly this home?" James asked eagerly, ignoring her threats.

"Oh for Gods sake... Give it to me." Lily demanded in an exasperated voice.

"But Lils... Please? It wont hurt anyone I promise. I'll just fly this there and..."

"No James." Lily cut him off firmly.

"Please?"

"No."

"Please Lils? Please?" James said pleadingly, with large puppy dog eyes.

"The last thing we need is random sightings of a dead wizard flying over London on a haywire broom!" Lily said through clenched teeth.
"For the last ruddy time, No!"

"Fine." James hissed as he placed Harry's broom carefully back into the box, closing the lid with an angry snap. "Have it your way."

"Oh don't sulk, James." Lily scolded. "It's not very becoming."

"It's not very becoming..." James mocked angrily behind her back in a quiet nagging voice.

"What was that?" She said sharply as she spun around.

"Nothing. Dear." James said in a borderline sarcastic voice.

"Grab the box and let's get out of here." Lily said with a sigh. "If the Order isn't watching this place I'm the queen of England."

"Wouldn't be surprised, the way you act like you're the boss of everything..." James muttered sulkily.

"What's he muttering about?" Anna asked as she entered the room, eyeing James suspiciously.

"He's just sulking cause I wouldn't let him ride Harry's broom." Lily said stiffly. "Are you all packed, Dear?"

"Yup." Anna replied dragging two large suitcases into the room proudly.

"What?" James jaw dropped, "All that?"

"Yes." Anna said defensively. "Who knows how long we'll have to stay with you for?"

"Two suitcases?" James said faintly.

Lily cleared her throat. "That's what shrinking charms are for, Dear. Maybe if you read as much as Hermione appears too, you might have remembered that." She said snidely.

"I guess my parents aren't so unique after all." Anna said with a shrug as she watched the bickering pair glare at each other.

"What was that dear?" Lily asked Anna kindly.

"Oh nothing." Anna said with a small smile. "Did you find everything?"

"Yes, I believe so. So we really should get going, hand me your suitcases, Anna, that's it." James said, casting Lily malicious looks as he successfully shrank her cases.

"Ok, hold on now." Lily said as James grabbed Harry's box and tucked it under his arm as he held onto Lily and Anna. "This may feel a little strange dear." She said gently to Anna.

Anna nodded and gulped.

"Alright, here we go. Three, Two, One..."

Crack!

Crack!

A sharp sound like a car backfiring shot through Grimmauld place in the early hours of Thursday morning. A lone cloaked figure looked about carefully, then rushed toward an old house. The moon shone brightly through the sailing clouds, casting shadows across the street. All was quiet in Grimmauld Place as the figure panted heavily on her approach to the door.

The sharp, rapid knocking on the door of number 12 Grimmauld Place awoke Mrs. Black suddenly, who filled the house with ghastly shrieks and wailing. As the cloaked figure who waited impatiently outside the door listened to the commotion, they distinctly heard a hurried roll of footsteps thunder toward the door. The visitor's rapid, shallow breathing began to increase again as the portrait was calmed and the door creaked open a smidgeon.

"Who is it?" Hissed Molly Weasley's voice from behind the door.

"It's me Molly, It's Tonks." She breathed.

"Come in quickly, Dear." Molly ushered her inside.

"Where's Dumbledore?" She demanded hastily, "It's Urgent."

"Is it Harry?" Molly asked in despair as her face drained of all color.

"No Molly. Not Harry, but just as important. Where is he?" Tonks urged.

"The Living Room. But..."

"Thank you, Molly." Tonks cut her off as she hurried off to the Living room door.

Tonks was not looking forward to being the deliverer of such bad news. She herself, did not view that news as that terrible, but, seeing as how Dumbledore seemed very invested in his theory that Hermione sold Harry out, she knew he would take it badly. She, after interrogating the girl, believed that she was just as shocked about Harry's disappearance as the rest of them. The fact that Dumbledore seemed to have some vendetta against Hermione did not escape Tonks' notice, and made her very uneasy for reasons she could not explain. As she reached the Living Room door she did not wait to knock, she needed to get this over and done with as soon as possible.

"Albus!" Tonks exclaimed as she burst into the living room. "Oh... I- "

Tonks' face reddened as she realized she had interrupted a private conversation between the Professor and Ron Weasley. Dumbledore had started, and jumped up from his chair hastily. He had been sitting directly in front of Ron, deep in low voiced, urgent conversation. Although she now had the Headmaster's full attention, Tonks could not help but look past him at Ron, who appeared to be very dazed, staring into the fireplace.

"I'm terribly sorry, Albus." She said apologetically as she made to back out of the room.

"Tosh Nymphadora!" Dumbledore said in an overly cheerful voice as he advanced toward her. "What can I do for you?"

"It's regarding the Grangers, Albus." Tonks said in a low voice, stiffening slightly at the usage of her first name. "They've disappeared..."

"What?" Dumbledore said sharply, his eyebrows raising dangerously.

"The house. It's deserted, Albus." Tonks explained.

"I thought I made it clear that they were to be under twenty four hour surveillance." Dumbledore said sternly, his anger rising.

"Y- you did, Sir. But..."

"So who then is responsible for letting the Grangers elude us?" Dumbledore inquired, his beady eyes glittering dangerously behind his half moon spectacles.

"Mundungus and I were on duty Sir..."

"Both of you? And yet they still managed to escape beneath your very noses?" Dumbledore asked sternly.

"I wasn't aware that they were being held captive, Sir." Tonks replied a little too formally.

"Three of the Four members of that family are the main suspects in connection with the disappearance of Harry Potter. Your objective was to keep them under constant surveillance and not allow them out of your sight for a moment." Dumbledore boomed angrily, "So, perhaps you ought to fill me in on how they have 'disappeared', when you were right there watching them."

Tonks took a deep breath. "Mundungus told me that yesterday night about ten O'clock an owl arrived for Hermione. A snowy Owl." Tonks put extra emphasis on the snowy.

"Harry's?" Dumbledore raised an eyebrow.

"I believe so, Sir." Tonks nodded.

"Why was I not informed?" Dumbledore blurted out angrily.

"Because Mundungus saw it of no significance." Tonks said darkly, "If you wish to have the job done properly, don't hire thieves."

"Enough, Nymphadora. Mundungus has his uses. Carry on." He barked.

"There was no significant occurrences until 7pm tonight, when Hermione and her parents appeared to apparate out of the living room. As you were informed, they left behind the eldest child, therefore leading us to the conclusion that they would be returning. Because their departure was so sudden and without warning, we could not put a trace on where they had disappeared too."

"Where upon I informed you to keep a close eye on the eldest child, to prevent any events such as this from taking place." Dumbledore said through gritted teeth. "What happened?"

"The girl just lay around the house all night watching that television thing." Tonks stated in a bored voice, "It wasn't until approximately 0135 hours that anything out of the ordinary happened. All the lights in the house went out at that time, we assumed it was some sort of muggle electricity malfunction. We decided to give it the benefit of the doubt and wait it out. There was no sounds, nothing out of the ordinary. When it got to 0200 we decided to investigate. We infiltrated the house to discover it was empty. The eldest child's wardrobe had been cleaned out and so had Hermione's. Several items had been moved and removed from her room."

"Did it ever occur to you that whoever came to collect her used an Imperturbable Charm on the house?" Dumbledore asked gratingly.

"No Sir." Tonks painfully admitted, avoiding eye contact defiantly. "We didn't expect anyone to come for her. There is something else.."

"Yes?" Dumbledore said raising his eyebrows.

"The eldest child, Mundungus said he was looking through Hermione's bedroom window and he saw two cloaked figures disapparating with her at approximately 0159. His claim is what caused us to infiltrate the house." Tonks said cautiously.

"You don't agree with my theory that Hermione is involved do you, Nymphadora?" Dumbledore asked casually after letting out a long deep sigh.

"What makes you say that?" Tonks asked edgily.

"You aren't taking this mission seriously." Dumbledore replied.

"I'm trying my best, Sir."

"You let your guard down." Dumbledore said stiffly.

"Yes Sir." Tonks replied, her eyes boring into him silently.

"Return to the house immediately and conduct a full search. Take Remus and Bill. I want any evidence you can find of anyone being there. I want answers. If Hermione was in contact with Harry then I want her found. I don't care how long it takes. Find her." Dumbledore barked. "I think it's time I went to the Minister with this. We have a dangerous fugitive on the loose. We need the Aurors."

"Dangerous?" Tonks repeated in disbelief.

"Dangerous." Dumbledore confirmed, throwing her a dark look.
"Wanted in connection with the abduction and possible murder of Harry Potter."

"But Sir..." Tonks protested.

"No But's, Nymphadora. You have your new mission, now leave me. I will handle the rest."

"Yes Sir." Tonks repeated, turning to leave the room.

"Oh, and Nymphadora?" Dumbledore called to her as she reached the door frame.

"Yes, Sir?" She replied as she turned to face him.

"Never second guess me again." He said coldly as he turned away from her, returning to his seat in front of Ron, who was still sitting, dazed, staring at the fireplace.

As Tonks shut the door with a snap Dumbledore settled himself down comfortably and gazed into Ron's eyes. The boy's eyes were slightly misty and out of focus, as if he were sleeping with eyes open. Dumbledore gave a satisfactory nod, pleased that the boy was still under the effects of the truth serum. He leaned back in his chair and eyed the boy with interest.

"So sorry about that, Ronald. Now. Where were we? Ah, yes... Where is Harry Potter?"

Crack!

"Ok, that was weird." Anna said faintly as they arrived in Potter mansion.

"That? Weird? Those muggle things you call cars are weird..." James muttered under the strain of the girl's suitcases.

"Where's Hermione?" Anna asked casually.

"Upstairs with Harry." Lily replied, "Though I wouldn't go in there just yet if I were you, I think she's just told him she's pregnant."

"Ok, I'm definitely staying out of that one." Anna said cheerfully, "Well, I dunno about you guys but I'm a little tired. Show me a place to crash and I'll be out like a light for a week."

"We can only hope." James muttered under his breath.

Lily shoved an elbow into James ribs causing him to grimace in pain as she smiled politely to Anna.

"Be a dear, James, and go and check on Harry. Would you?" She said through gritted teeth a little too politely.

"Anything for you, my dear." James replied in borderline sarcasm.

Lily gave him a deathly stare as she turned to Anna and beckoned her to follow her up the staircase. James followed along behind them, grumbling quietly under his breath as he juggled Anna's suitcases, Hermione's suitcase and Harry's box. When he at long last reached the top of the stairs he dropped Anna's suitcases and continued on with Hermione's, making his way toward Harry's room. Lily's scowl followed him all the way to the room but was forced to break contact when she turned off to Anna's guest room. James reached Harry's room and lightly knocked on the door.

"Pregnant?" Harry repeated in a daze.

"I'm sorry," Hermione began as she attempted to rise from his bedside, "I shouldn't have said anything..."

"No." Harry said anxiously, grabbing her arm to prevent her from leaving, "No it's ok, I'm just surprised..."

"Surprised or freaking out?" Hermione questioned with a frown.

"Definitely surprised." Harry confirmed.

Hermione sat back down heavily on his bedside and let out a sigh. Harry smiled and took her hand in his, squeezing it gently. Hermione looked up at his face, seeing him struggling to smile at her, and tears stung her eyes. He reached out slowly with his other hand and felt around for her face, which he stroked softly.

"I'm sorry, Harry." Hermione whispered.

"I'm not." He said with a small smile. "So why should you be?"

"It's all so fast, It should never have happened." She blurted out.

"But it did, and it doesn't matter how fast it's happening. It's happening, and that's all we have to worry about." Harry said softly.
"We can do this, Hermione."

Harry felt Hermione nod.

"Who else knows?" Harry asked gently.

"My parents... and yours. They kinda worked it out, I'm sorry." She added quickly.

"It's alright, they had to know sooner or later."

"But I wanted you to be the first to know..." she said quietly.

"Well, I was unconscious." Harry said with a weak grin. "So I forgive you."

"That's why I went to the Dursleys to see you. I was going to tell you then except..."

"By the time you got to my room I wasn't there." Harry finished for her, frowning slightly.

"Exactly." She said quietly.

"Did you tell Dumbledore?" Harry asked slowly.

"No. I didn't want to tell him until I'd told you, even if it would have made my story more feasible. I'm glad I didn't tell him now. Harry, we don't know what he's capable of..." Hermione said in a fearful voice.

"I think it would be best if he doesn't find out at all." Harry murmured.
"Definitely not until I'm back at full power, at the very least."

"Do you think he'd..."

"I don't know what he'd do, Hermione, and I don't want to find out. I won't put you and our child at risk." Harry said frowning.

Hermione looked up in surprise. "You're not mad?"

Harry smiled painfully. "Hermione, I don't think you understand... I love you."

A light knocking came to their ears from the door, and Hermione turned to see James enter the room, carrying Harry's box and a large suitcase. He smiled seeing her confusion as he placed them at the foot of Harry's bed.

"Sorry to interrupt. We went to collect your sister from your house, your parents thought there was a few things you might like to have, so we got you some clean clothes and this." He said with a grin, waving the box.

"Thank you." Hermione said with a small smile.

"Harry, that is one amazing broom you have." James said in an awe filled voice.

"W..W...What broom?" Harry asked in panic.

"What do you mean, Broom?" Hermione shot at James, casting a glare at Harry, "Harry's Firebolt was taken during the school year, he hasn't got it back yet."

"Umm..." James began nervously.

"Nice one, Dad. Drop me in it why don't you?" Harry muttered in defeat.

"Umm, so she doesn't know then?" James asked cautiously.

"Of course she doesn't bloody know. She nearly had my head over the first one." Harry said testily.

"First one? HARRY JAMES you didn't!" Hermione roared.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Hermione..." Harry said innocently.

"Don't you act all innocent with me, Harry. I know when you're up to something, spill it." She demanded.

"I don't know what you're talking about." he repeated firmly.

"Ok," Hermione said in a calm voice, "So if you don't know what I'm talking about, you wont mind if I destroy that box you had me take over the summer..."

"Ok, so maybe I do know what you're talking about" Harry said quickly.

"I thought you might." Hermione said darkly.

"I don't suppose you love me enough to not be mad about this?" Harry asked hopefully.

"Oh, nice. I wonder if that one would work on Lily..." James pondered out loud.

Hermione shot him one of her patented death glares and James fell silent.

"Worth a try." Harry said to himself, with a painful shrug.

"I thought you would have learnt your lesson after the first one!" Hermione barked.

"I did, Hermione." Harry insisted, "This one is tons better than the first."

"It really is, you know." James piped up.

"How would you know you never saw the first one!" Hermione shot at him, causing him to grumble quietly.

"Don't worry Hermione. If you're that worried about it, I'll let you perform any test on it you wish before I use it. But I guarantee you its perfectly safe."

This seemed to calm Hermione down somewhat, "Well. Alright then!" She snapped. "But I'm still mad that you hid it from me."

"I'm truly sorry." Harry said with a sly grin.

"It truly is the most amazing Broom I've ever seen." James said to Harry quietly.

"Thanks Dad." Harry said with a small smile.

"Your mother refused to let me fly it home. Something about dead wizards being seen on haywire brooms over London. Women." He scoffed bitterly.

Harry laughed. Something which he instantly regretted as it felt as though ten thousand knives were piercing his lungs, but he laughed all the same. "I'll let you fly it sometime when she's not around, Dad."

"Really? Excellent." James said excitedly.

"But in the meantime, there's something I'm more concerned about that I need to discuss with you." Harry said seriously.

"What is it, Harry?" James asked in alarm.

"How Dumbledore will react when he discovers Hermione and her family have disappeared, and what lengths he will go to to make sure she is recovered..."

Chapter Thirteen: In The Chilly Hours And Minutes Of Uncertainty

Daily Prophet; 18th of July, 1996

BOY WHO LIVED MYSTERIOUSLY DISAPPEARS

In breaking news today, Albus Dumbledore shocked the wizarding world when he announced that The Boy Who Lived had disappeared under suspicious circumstances, following a major disturbance at the boy's residence two nights ago. The current Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry made the announcement after appealing to the Minister of Magic for his assistance with inquiries.

"I am sad to say that Harry Potter is indeed missing. We have reason to believe that he may be in considerable danger, and we fear for his safety now that Voldemort is back at full power." Dumbledore reported to the Daily Prophet's reporters outside the ministry building yesterday. "I was summoned to his residence by a friend of the boy's moments after a major magical disturbance ripped through the area and destroyed the protection spells over the house. When I arrived there was no sign of the boy, and his relatives were apparently oblivious to his whereabouts. The Protection spells placed over the house were utterly destroyed. This alone suggests foul play, as only a very powerful wizard could have broken down the barriers."

Harry has been plagued with attempted murder ever since he started school at Hogwarts Five years ago. He is the only known person to survive the killing curse, and is the boy who destroyed Lord Voldemort, only to have him return to his body at the end of last year. Dumbledore implores anyone with any knowledge or information regarding Harry or his disappearance to come forward. He also appeals to the community to keep their eyes peeled for any sign of the Boy Who Lived.

"We are confident that Harry is alive, and we will not stop looking until the boy is found." Dumbledore stated when faced with the question, 'Do you think he will be found alive?"

"Voldemort could very likely be involved, of course we hope that is not the case." He said, after being asked if he believed if this was another one of Voldemort's revenge attempts.

When probed further into what was discovered in the house to make them suspicious of foul play, Dumbledore politely refused to comment. Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge grimly emerged from his office several hours later to inform reporters that Dumbledore would be taking control of the investigation into Potter's, age 15, disappearance, and the ministry gave full backing to the headmaster. The minister publicly sent his condolences to the family and friends of Harry, and vows that no one will rest until Harry is recovered.

Daily Prophet; 20th of July, 1996

BOY WHO LIVED'S BEDROOM DRENCHED IN BLOOD

A source who wishes to remain anonymous today informed the Daily Prophet that Harry Potter's room was filled with blood when it was found empty four days ago. The Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge has been unavailable for comment today, but the claims have been blatantly denied by Albus Dumbledore, who refuses to verify the rumor. This latest news has shocked the wizarding world further and many now fear that the boy savior may already be dead. However Harry's former Headmaster remains confident that the boy will be found alive.

"We have several leads that we are investigating, and we are confident that Harry will be recovered any day now. We are not treating this as a murder inquiry at this stage." Dumbledore informed Daily Prophet reporter Alan Palmer. "We have detained six suspects that we believe are connected to the disappearance, and will continue to question these persons until we are satisfied they are not involved."

When asked if these suspects were muggles or wizards, Dumbledore informed us that the six were of mixed orientation, some muggles, some wizards. He would not verify the sex or age of these suspects, but said that the majority of them were being held under constant

supervision. Dumbledore refused to state whether or not Potter's Aunt and Uncle, his only living relatives, were being questioned in regards to the boys disappearance. It is widely known amongst Harry's friends that his Aunt and Uncle despise his wizarding connections, and many are suspicious of their involvement.

Questions have begun to arise amongst the public of whether the Dark Lord and his Death Eaters have any involvement in this case, and, if so, what is Dumbledore doing to locate the culprits? For now, the Headmaster informs us that it is not necessary to track down the Dark Lord, as he does not suspect his involvement in Harry's disappearance. This strikes the daily Prophet as odd, as Potter is the Dark Lord's sworn enemy since Harry's attempt to vanquish him when he was but one year old. Never the less, today's tidings of Harry's blood soaked room make the likelihood of finding Potter alive far less likely. Things are indeed looking grim for the Boy Who Lived.

Daily Prophet; 24th July, 1996

DUMBLEDORE REQUESTS ASSISTANCE FROM MINISTER IN HUNT FOR FUGITIVE

The major suspect in the case of missing Harry Potter has disappeared along with two accomplices, states Professor Albus Dumbledore in a brief announcement made early this morning outside the Ministry of Magic. Dumbledore today named the suspect as Hermione Granger, aged 16, a close personal friend of Potter's from Hogwarts. The accomplices were named as Jonathan and Julia Granger, Hermione's parents. Dumbledore stated to our journalists this morning that the Grangers slipped through their surveillance late yesterday afternoon, and appear to be on the run.

"They returned to the house briefly to collect clothing and personal belongings, when my surveillance team entered the house, they found it cleaned out. It is very clear that these three have decided to run, and we now have a strong case of their involvement in Harry's disappearance." Dumbledore told reporters this morning.

Hermione Granger was released from custody only four days prior to her disappearance, and her family home had been under twenty four hour watch since that time. In what the media is calling the greatest blunder of the 21st century, the Granger family somehow managed to disappear from beneath the very noses of Dumbledore's trusted colleagues in the Order of the Phoenix. Dumbledore has yet to reveal whether Hermione was the friend he stated summoned him to Harry's house moments after the magical disturbance.

"Hermione Granger is a very capable and powerful witch, and she has already proved how far she will go when pushed. If anyone sees Hermione Granger or her parents, please contact the ministry immediately, do not under any circumstances confront her, as she is considered highly dangerous." Dumbledore announced to the public today. Descriptions of Miss Granger and her parents are listed below, and photographs are on page nine.

Albus Dumbledore has made a personal plea to the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, to assist in the search for the fugitives, who have been on the run since late yesterday afternoon. Dumbledore said today in a short briefing with the media that his resources are stretched and he requires assistance from the Ministry's Aurors to continue his investigations. The Minister has yet to comment. There has been no confirmed sightings of Harry Potter since leaving Kings Cross Station at the end of the school year. Harry Potter has been missing for Eight days, since his room was reportedly discovered empty and spattered with blood on the 16th of July.

As the sun set on the second day since Hermione and her family had come to stay permanently, Harry gingerly made his way to the balcony outside his bedroom. As he felt around for the door handle his palm gently brushed the cold steel, he turned it slowly and pushed it open. The warmth of the dying sun's rays penetrated his skin immediately as the soft breeze hit him head on. He stepped out onto the balcony carefully, clutching onto the door for security as he reached out with his other hand for the railing. As his fingertips touched the warm metal he grasped the rail and released the door, holding on with both hands tightly clenched.

Harry turned his face until he could feel the full heat of the sun baring down directly on his skin, raising his head hopefully. Lily had been reluctant to let him move once he was awake. When he said he wanted to get up to stretch his legs the day before she had nearly tied him down. But Harry showed a stubborn determination she had seen before in his father, and she knew there was no way she could prevent him from leaving the bed. Harry had begun walking with James and Jonathan each under one arm, helping to keep him steady as he adjusted to his newly healed bones. This had been the one rule of Lily's that Harry could not brush aside.

He had spent most of the previous day moving about as much as possible, getting a feel for his legs again. He found that the more he walked, the easier it became, and this evening, for the first time, he had managed to move from his bed to the balcony on his own, although Lily had no idea he had attempted it. He refused to believe that it may take him weeks to walk again, as far as he was concerned, he had far too much else to worry about. No matter what his mother said, he would walk again much sooner than anyone expected, he was positive of it.

As the sinking sun beat down upon his face Harry found himself longing for a glimpse of color in his world of darkness. Even the great sun could not penetrate the black world his Uncle had so graciously left him to dwell in. Harry could feel the temperature begin to sink with the sun, and a crisp cool came to the air as shadows rose slowly. He heard someone enter the room behind him, but he did not bother to turn. Soon enough the footsteps slowly made their way to where he was, and emerged out onto the balcony, ceasing only when they reached his side.

The long sigh that was then let out Harry immediately recognized as his mothers'. He felt the railing move gently as she placed her hands on it and leaned against them, looking out over the world next to him. Harry remained silent, staring up at the sun as Lily shifted next to him. She glanced from his face, to where his face was pointed and frowned.

"You walk out here yourself?" She asked quietly.

Harry gave a small nod, but continued to stare at the sun.

"You're just like your father. Stubborn, determined... strong." she said wistfully.

Harry made no reply.

"How are you feeling?" She probed.

"Much better." He replied quietly.

"You're healing well." She acknowledged.

"All thanks to you." Harry said with a small smile.

Lily smiled softly, then bit her lip before posing her next question.

"How are you coping, other than that?"

"With adjusting to you and James being alive?" Harry asked, mildly surprised. "I – I don't really know."

Lily smiled sadly. "It's easier for James and I. We knew and loved you before you were – taken from us. You... well, you didn't know us at all."

"I know it's not rational," Harry began slowly, "But it hurts. It hurts that you and dad weren't there for me when I was growing up. You don't know how many times I wished someone would come and rescue me from the Dursleys as a kid, that someone would come and rescue me from that hell. And now I find out it was all in vain. There was no reason behind me being there, no reason for me to have been separated from you except for an old man's manipulations. It's not your fault, I know that... But it still hurts mom."

Lily nodded slowly, tears threatening her eyes. "I understand, Harry." she said softly. "I understand..."

Silence fell between the mother and son as they watched the sun slowly sink towards the ground, the great black silhouettes of oak trees obscuring its entirety. Harry knew it was almost gone now by

the coolness of the air, the dimness of the light on his face, the goose bumps on his skin. In his mind he tried to capture the beauty of what he was missing, to paint the picture of the scene before him, but he found he could not.

"I wish I could see it." Harry said after a moment of silence, motioning to the setting sun. "The sunset. I never really appreciated it when I was able to see it. And now... I can't even recollect what it looks like."

Lily's eyes turned sadly to her grown up son's bruised face and a lone tear slid down her face. Wiping it away hastily she cleared her throat and turned to face him, standing tall.

"Come here. Let me see you." She said commandingly as she took his face gently in her hands and turned his head towards her.

Her hands felt warm against the skin of his jaw as she turned his head gently from side to side. As Lily leaned closer she examined his face carefully, running her fingers gently over and around his swollen eyes. Her smell reminded him of a long lost memory, vanilla, it took him back to a place he had almost forgotten existed. A time when he had not a care in the world. Lily's hands dropped to his shoulders as she spoke.

"I think the swelling is down enough for me to examine your eyes properly now, Harry. If you're ready..."

"Of course." Harry said quietly. "I need to know..."

"Come on then, Harry." She said softly, "Lets go check out these eyes of yours."

As the sun's final slither disappeared below the horizon Lily took Harry by the shoulders and beckoned him indoors. She was surprised at how well he was managing to walk despite all his newly healed injuries. In fact the only assistance he required of her was when he finally reached the bed and could not lift his legs up to lie down. Once he was comfortably settled Lily went to get her wand and a few other bits and pieces to assist her in her examination. However just as she

left the room she walked right into Hermione, who was about to enter and check on Harry.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Potter." Hermione quickly apologized as she backed up a few steps.

"It's alright, Hermione." Lily replied, rubbing her eyes hastily.

"Are you alright?" Hermione asked in concern.

"I'm fine, Dear." Lily replied quickly. "I'm fine."

"You look upset about something. Is Harry alright?"

"Oh, he's fine." Lily said casually. "We just had a little talk that's all."

"Ah." Hermione said slowly, guessing the topic of their conversation.

"I knew it would be hard for him." Lily said quietly, tears burning her eyes once more. "I just, I didn't know it would be this hard."

"Harry will be fine," Hermione said earnestly, "You just need to give him some time. You're right, It will be hard for him, because of the emotional abuse he's suffered. It's not your fault, but he's had a hard life."

"I know. It's just, I've missed 15 years of Harry's life already. James and I were robbed of our son. I don't want to waste anymore time..."

"Harry was robbed of you and James also, remember?" Hermione reminded her kindly, "Give him some time, I know it won't take him long, he just needs to adjust, that's all."

Lily nodded slowly. "The swelling is down. I'm about to check his eyes, if you'd like to be there..."

"Of course." Hermione said quickly, her eyes lighting up with a glimmer of hope. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"No." Lily said with a small smile, "Just sit with him while I go and get my things organized. I won't be long. I need to find James. Perhaps your parents and your sister would like to be present also?"

Hermione nodded. "Yes, I think they would. I'll go and find them." She said with a small frown. "I'd like them to be there, they'll want to show their support if..."

"Don't worry, Hermione." Lily said kindly, "We will figure this out."

James fidgeted restlessly as Lily at last stood up straight and gave Harry some room. He looked upon his wife with hopeful eyes that were soon downtrodden by the expression on her face. Lily Potter let out a long deep sigh.

"I'm so sorry, Harry." Lily said quietly, Harry could tell from her voice that her eyes were filling with tears.

"No..." Hermione whispered in disbelief.

Harry knew from the moment she had started talking that there was nothing his mother could do to save his eyesight. She had been examining his eyes for the past ten minutes, shining light into them, performing various spells and enchantments to assist her. When she began to check the eyes anxiously again for the third time he knew that they were beyond repair. He had been preparing himself for the news ever since he had first woken from his coma, but still it was a large blow.

Hermione's mother, father and sister were all sitting against the far wall, watching with great anticipation as Lily worked on her son. Hermione was sitting on the edge of Harry's bed opposite James, who was standing next to Lily, his hands on her shoulders comfortingly. Harry let out a large sigh, squeezing Hermione's hand gently. He could sense that she was working herself up, and getting upset would not be good for their unborn child.

"I can't fix them. The acid- it reached and destroyed the nerves behind your eyes." Lily continued chokily, "I can fix the eye itself, but it will never work properly again, you will never have your normal eyesight back..."

James closed his eyes slowly in painful defeat. A collective sigh went out from everyone in the room.

"No! There must be something you can do!" Hermione insisted in frustration.

"It's ok, Hermione. Calm down. The baby..." Harry consoled her quietly. "I understand."

"I'm so sorry Harry..." Lily repeated, tears stinging her eyes.

"You did everything you could." Harry replied softly. "This isn't your fault..."

"He's right, Lil." James said soothingly. "We have our dear brother-in-law to thank for that. It's about time I sent him my regards actually..."

"There has to be something else we can try!" Hermione persisted cutting James off, her words getting stuck on the painful lump blocking her throat.

"Hermione it's ok." Harry insisted gently. "Lily did everything she could. The acid went too deep, 'Mione. We knew that it was always a strong possibility. We knew..."

"But it wasn't supposed to be this way..." Hermione said thickly through her tears as she sobbed into Harry's chest. "You were supposed to be alright..."

"'Mione, I am alright." Harry said with a small half hearted chuckle. "It'll take more than being blind to knock me back."

"You can't be blind." Hermione refused to acknowledge his testimony. "There must be something... Anything we can do."

"Maybe there is something we can try." Harry said suddenly as he stroked Hermione's hair gently, "Maybe I can get something like Moody's eye..."

"Alastor Moody?" James asked in surprise. "You mean his magical eye?"

"Exactly." Harry said with a small smile, a new ray of hope shining in on him.

"Who is Alastor Moody?" Jonathan asked in curiosity.

"He is a member of the Order of the Phoenix. He lost his eye in a duel with a deatheater once. He has a magical eye that can see at 360 degrees and through almost any material." Harry explained.

"He's an interesting guy." James said with a grin, a new hope welling within him.

"That's not interesting." Jonathan said seriously. "That's disturbing..."

"Of course." Hermione whispered in enlightenment. "Moody's eye... Why didn't I think of it before?"

"Possibly because you had a lot else on your mind before other than my eyesight." Harry said with a grin.

Hermione made a noise of annoyance. "Well that's no excuse!"

"And still I forgive you." Harry said as if this was an enigma.

Hermione made an exasperated noise as she jumped to her feet. "I'll be back later." She said as she ran out of the room.

"Where are you going?" Anna called in alarm.

"I'll explain later!" Hermione shot back over her shoulder as she ran out of the door.

Lily shot James a puzzled look as Harry began to laugh quietly.

"Don't worry," He began with a grin, "She does this all the time. Exclaims something no one understands and that she should have thought of it before, then runs off to the library for a while. When she comes back she'll have it all figured out, I assure you."

"Does she even know where our library is?" James asked in surprise.

"Are you kidding?" Anna asked from behind them with a laugh. "She would have sniffed it out within five minutes of arriving here."

Her comment earned her a light clip around the ear from her father, who gave her a threatening look.

"Jeez dad. I was only kidding..." Anna said angrily as she rubbed her ear.

"It wouldn't surprise me judging by the state of her room." James sniggered in reply, only to be clipped around the ear by Lily.

"Ouch." James cried out in indignation.

"What did I tell you about reading?" She hissed through clenched teeth.

"Yes Dear." James grumbled.

"Harry are you sure you want to try something like Moody's eye?" Lily asked seriously, switching her attention back to her son.

"I want to see, mom." Harry replied earnestly, "I just want to see."

"Alright, Harry." Lily said with a small smile after a moments thought. "I'll go help, Hermione."

"Mom?" Harry called and she turned around in the door way to face him, "Thank you."

Lily smiled, her eyes shining. "You're welcome..."

As the door closed behind Lily, James turned to Harry and sat down on the edge of his bed, leaning close to him so only he could hear.

"I think it's time I paid your Uncle a visit." James said grimly.

"No." Harry said sternly. "We can't risk anyone knowing you're alive. Not yet. Not until I'm recovered."

"Harry..." James began, "He blinded you..."

"If it's revenge you're after you can rest easy. What I have in store for Vernon is only the very tip of a very, very large iceberg." Harry said darkly.

"Perhaps you would care to enlighten me?" James asked in curiosity.

"It begins with something I like to call total domination. I happen to know that Vernon has a very large mortgage on number four, Privet Drive. I also happen to know that the company he works for, Grunnings, is owned and controlled by shareholders."

"You're planning on buying out the company?" James asked in shock.

"Exactly." Harry said darkly.

"And the mortgage?" James inquired.

"I am sure I can get the president of the National Bank of Great Britain to sell me the mortgage of Number Four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging." Harry said with a confident smirk.

"I'm sure you can." James said encouragingly, a small grin creeping over his face, "I'm him."

"What?" Harry asked in confusion.

"The President of the National Bank of Great Britain. That's me."

"You're the president of a chain of muggle banks?" Harry clarified in disbelief.

"Several actually. Different chains of banks all over the world." James said proudly.

"Why?" Harry asked in confusion.

"I got bored." James replied simply.

"Bored?" Harry repeated faintly.

"I had to have something to keep me busy." James said defensively.

"Well," Harry said distantly after a few moments. "At least this means I don't have to dig up dirt on you to force the closure."

"Apparently not." James said with a smirk. "Devious much?"

Harry smirked. "I hear that kind of thing runs in the genes."

"You hear correctly. You're like a bloody clone." James said in awe.

"Sirius said something similar once." Harry reminisced. "Will you be able to close the deal with the Little Whining Branch?"

"Of course. I'll sign a few things, stamp a few things and it'll be all yours."

"How did you never get spotted? If you're the president of a major chain of banks in Great Britain, why didn't someone recognize you?" Harry asked.

James smiled. "My job is behind the scenes really, Harry. I have little to no contact with the branches throughout the country. I make a few phone calls here and there, but I rarely ever show my face."

"Sounds like a good deal" Harry said nodding slowly.

James shrugged. "Kept my mind off of things..."

Harry nodded.

"Well, that should start Vernon off on a downward spiral." Harry said with a grim look, returning to the main subject.

James faltered and smiled sadly. "Vernon isn't the only one who needs to pay for what he's done."

"Dumbledore?" Harry probed.

"It's been two days, Harry. They'll think she's on the run. What do you propose we do about Dumbledore trying to find Hermione? She's in danger as long as they hunt her." James asked quietly.

"I have a plan, but I'm still thinking it through. By now he would have discovered she has disappeared, he's probably enlisted the services of the Aurors." Harry replied with a frown.

"We need to act quickly then, in the interests of protecting Hermione and her family." James observed.

"Yes." Harry stated carefully, "But we need to go above Dumbledore to protect Hermione. And I think I have someone who may be able to help us with that task."

"You seem to have this well thought out, Harry." James noted.

"I've had a lot of time to think." Harry replied frowning. "It's imperative that we get this under control before something happens that we cannot prevent. I need to get into contact with Gringotts."

"Gringotts?" James repeated, raising an eyebrow.

"I have a job for Griphook." Harry said simply.

"Griphook is still managing the Potter accounts?" James asked in surprise.

"Yes." Harry said with a smile, "He's been very loyal to me. He's perfect for what I have planned."

"How do we get into contact with him?" James asked. "You're incapacitated."

"You'll have to go." Harry said simply.

"What?" James blurted out. "What happened to keeping Lily and I a secret?"

"You'll have to go as me." Harry told him, patting him on the shoulder.

"Harry I'm 36 years old." James protested.

"And apparently we're the spitting image of each other. Give you a pair of green eyes and a scar shaped like lightning, maybe a little help from a potion and you're sorted." Harry said with a grin.

"Harry." James reasoned, "The minute you're - I'm seen the Order of the Phoenix will be all over Diagon Alley ready to take you in."

"It's a good thing you can apparate then, isn't it?" Harry said with a grin, "You'll go into Gringotts hooded, when you come out, remove the hood, do a little tour around the alley, once a few people have

seen me alive and well, get out of there. If I'm spotted alive, the hype will die down a little. It'll only help us convince them to drop the investigation."

"And if Griphook realizes I'm not you?" James asked.

"Griphook is loyal dad, he speaks very highly of you to this very day. If he figures out that you aren't me, he'll figure out who you really are. I trust him, he won't betray us. If anyone can help us put a stop to Dumbledore hunting Hermione and her family down, It's Griphook."

"How far do you think he would go? Dumbledore?" James asked slowly on a more serious note.

"Who knows what he's really capable of?" Harry replied. "But I won't take the risk of finding out. I need to get him off of Hermione's trail."

James nodded. "When should I go?" he asked resolutely.

"Tomorrow." Harry stated firmly. "We'll arrange everything in the morning. We'll need to move quickly, he'll have members of the Order tearing Hermione's house apart by now."

James nodded silently in return as the door of the room opened again and Hermione and Lily strode back in looking mightily pleased with themselves. Behind them Julia and Jonathan had become very wide eyed and pale at the mention of their beautiful house being torn apart. Julia let out a shaky whimper as Anna rolled her eyes then suddenly grew fiery.

"If they hurt my CD collection by god I'll..." Anna began loudly.

"I'll fix anything they break, I promise." Harry assured her.

"So, You're the infamous Harry Potter." Anna Granger said as she walked to the end of his bed and stood their placing her hands on her hips, staring at him darkly.

"The one and only." Harry said in a painful gasp. "Hermione's sister, I presume?"

"You presume correctly. Lucky for you someone messed you up before I had a chance, I can pack a punch." Anna said with a sly grin.

"I apologize. My uncle seems to have stripped you of the pleasure." Harry returned.

"No apology necessary." Anna said with a grin. "As long as you intend to stand by my sister and be the father of her child I see no reason for me to break your legs... again, as it were."

"I'm very glad you see things that way." Harry replied. "And for the record, I intend to stand by your sister."

"So she tells me." Anna replied, making herself comfortable on the side of his bed. "How are you holding up? I hear you've had an interesting night."

"Interesting is an understatement." Harry said with a sigh. "I have a child on the way and my dead parents have been alive all my life as it turns out. I could end up blind for life, and the one man I trusted above all has betrayed us all for some mysterious purpose. I could do with a firewhiskey right about now."

"I wouldn't say no to that, either." Anna said rolling her eyes. "I'm sorry, but having your whack job parents turn up and insist I accompany them to a place I don't know where they 'say' Hermione and my parents are is quite a frightening experience."

Harry grinned. "I can imagine."

"So when are you going to get out of that bed? I hear you haven't left it in over a week, lazy ass. And you might want to think about bathing at some stage. Personal Hygiene is an important part of daily living, you know?" Anna asked, raising an amused eyebrow.

"Wh- I've only just woken up from an eight day coma." Harry attempted to explain.

"Excuses Excuses." Anna said in a tisking voice, "Anyway, I think I'll let you off until morning. After all, it's nearly 4am. Everyone else has

gone to bed, but I thought I better not be rude and come and introduce myself now."

"Um, Thanks." Harry said uncertainly.

"You are most welcome." Anna said with a grin, "Now get some sleep. You're getting out of that bed tomorrow."

"But my bones have only just re-grown." Harry protested.

"What did I say about excuses?" Anna asked. "Goodnight Harry."

"That was fast, 'Mione. Figure it out already? You're getting good at this research thing." Harry said with a grin hearing her approach.

"I think we can make something like Moody's eye." Hermione said, beaming with pride, then added in an undertone. "But, I don't really think you'll want to replace both eyes with something like that."

"It's an extensive procedure." Lily explained. "We'd have to remove what remains of your real eyes, and replace them with implants."

Harry frowned. "And they wouldn't look normal?" He asked, imagining himself with two whizzing bright blue eyes spinning around frantically in their sockets.

"We'd try our best, of course." Lily assured him, "But they would still be noticeably fake."

"I see." Harry said quietly.

"But I had an idea." Lily continued. "What if we made something smaller. Something that would just fit over your normal eye?"

"Of course." Hermione exclaimed. "Contacts!"

"It's just a theory." Lily said quickly. "But I think we may be able to get them to have the same function as Moody's magical eye. And you wouldn't have to have your eyes removed once I've healed them, and they would look almost completely normal."

"It sounds too good to be true." Harry replied with a small smile. "It sounds wonderful..."

Chapter Fourteen: I Read The News Today, Oh Boy...

Daily Prophet, 25th July, 1996

FUDGE ASSIGNS 20 AURORS IN SEARCH FOR POTTER

In breaking news, Cornelius Fudge announced late last night that he has assigned the case of missing Harry Potter over to 20 of his most skilled Aurors, in hopes to find the boy swiftly. The move comes after Albus Dumbledore made a personal request to the minister for assistance in the case. Harry Potter has been missing since the 16th of July, after a major disturbance at his muggle household. The serious nature of the case escalated the night before last when major suspect in the case Hermione Granger, 16, disappeared with all her family from beneath Dumbledore's surveillance.

"It is the ministry's duty to ensure Potter is found safe and sound." Fudge was quoted as saying late yesterday afternoon. "If anyone has any information regarding the whereabouts of Harry or Hermione Granger please contact the ministry immediately."

The 20 strong squad will join forces with the Order of the Phoenix in the hunt for Harry Potter and his kidnapper. Dumbledore was quoted as saying this evening "Although it may seem likely to the public, all evidence is pointing away from an attack by Death Eaters or He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named at this stage." When questioned regarding the blood found in Potter's room, Dumbledore terminated the interview and abruptly left, saying he had no further comment at this stage. We are now left hoping that the strong force from the ministry will find the Boy-Who-Lived before it is too late.

Griphook sighed placing the Daily Prophet on his desk and rubbed his temples wearily. He had not made it past the front page despite it being midday, as he kept reading the article relating to Harry over and over again. He had been following the stories desperately, every day hoping for the headline that read, "Boy-Who-lived Alive and Well". His current situation reminded him remarkably of one he was in almost fifteen years ago, when he scanned the papers daily for any news of the Dark Lord's attacks. The day he had dreaded had at last

come in the form of the headline; "Dark Lord Vanquished: Deadly Battle At Godric's Hollow Leaves Potter Child Orphaned"

Later that day Albus Dumbledore had arrived to collect James and Lily's will, just as James said he would. He also took the letter addressed to Harry from his parents, informing Griphook that it was best Harry receive the letter from himself once he began Hogwarts. Griphook had agreed, being too saddened by Lily and James' deaths to argue with the man they had trusted most loyally. That had been so long ago now, but as he stared at the article and wondered if Harry would meet the same grim fate as his parents, he found the memories all came flooding back to him.

He was glad of one thing; It appeared that the ministry and Dumbledore were doing everything within their power to find Harry, wherever he was. But he could not bring himself to believe that the Granger girl was behind Harry's disappearance. He had dealt with her and her muggle family quite frequently as they came in to exchange currencies. She was a bright, cheerful sort of girl, and very very taken with young Mr. Potter. Griphook could not help but feel that they were chasing the wrong person in regards to Harry's disappearance, but he knew that the truth could only be revealed once Harry had been recovered.

Ever since the days that Lily and James had lived, Griphook had been extremely close to the Potter family, closer than the normal bounds of Accounts Manager – Customer. Once Harry had discovered his origins and made his way to Gringotts with that bizarre looking giant, Griphook had felt obligated to the child. He had gone out of his way at every corner to help Harry get acclimated to the wizarding world, he owed Lily and James that much. And now, as he stared at the headline regarding the boy's disappearance, he had a strange sensation of failure creeping over him.

Griphook had only been 15 minutes into his lunch break when the great door to his office grated open against the cold stone floor and a cloaked, hooded figure strode in, letting the door swing shut slowly behind him. The figure drew Griphook's undivided attention immediately. Although there was no way of determining who the

person beneath the shroud of the cloak was, there was something charismatic about their presence, something he had not felt since...

The cloaked figure continued to walk over and sit himself down in the chair opposite Griphook and place his feet up on his desk. He leaned back gracefully in the rickety chair which creaked ominously under his weight. As Griphook raised an eyebrow, waiting for a reply, the figure eyed him carefully.

"Good afternoon, Sir." Griphook wattled off the correct greeting, somewhat perplexed, "May I help you?"

"I thought you'd never ask, Griphook." the figure finally replied, lowering his hood gently to reveal a shockingly familiar face.

"Don't panic, Griphook." James said hastily, "It's me, Harry."

Griphook beheld the boy in shock, his eyes darting from the newspaper photograph before him to the boy in the chair. "But – But you've been missing for days! The ministry is going ballistic..."

"Well," James said with a small grin, "As you can see I'm perfectly alright, I just needed a break, that's all."

Griphook's look of surprise suddenly dropped to a look of calculated disbelief. His beady little eyes darkened as they fixed on the boy in the chair before them. Griphook's brow furrowed shrewdly as he clasped his hands together in front of him, elbows planted firmly on the desk.

"Clearly," Griphook stated in a cold voice, "You have no idea who you are dealing with."

"I beg your pardon?" James inquired.

"I've known Harry Potter since he was knee high to a Hinky punk." Griphook stated, his eyes boring into the boy.

"Of course you have, Griphook. You manage my accounts." James said in confusion.

"I deal with cases of identity theft and fraud on a day to day basis, Sir." Griphook continued, his furrowed brow twitching slightly.

"I am certain that that is so, Griphook, but what is your point?" James asked.

"My point is; you are not Harry Potter." Griphook said darkly.

"Ah." James said in defeat, "You're smarter than I give you credit for, my old friend. Though apparently I give you more credit than Harry does, he was sure you would fall for it."

"Who are you?" Griphook asked darkly, ignoring his proclamation.

"Well now, let me see." James said as he appeared to think about his answer. "The last time you saw me... I brought in a wooden box and asked you to store it in your office, so that in the event of my death, and my wife's, you could pass it on to our only son."

"Are you trying to tell me you are James Potter?" Griphook asked preposterously, "That is even more far fetched than you being Harry."

"That box contained several items. A will, which was to be collected by one Albus Dumbledore, A letter for my son, An invisibility cloak, and my family ring. The Potter Family ring." James continued.

"You could have forced Harry to tell you that." Griphook replied shrewdly.

"But Harry never got the letter, did he, Griphook?" James probed. "My instructions to you were to give the Letter to Harry and Harry alone, along with the other possessions I left him. But the letter wasn't with them, was it?"

Griphook attempted to fire back a response but then paused suddenly, his mind ticking over the events. "Dumbledore took it..." He admitted quietly.

"Very well." James said curtly, "Do you believe that I am James Potter now?"

"Why are you assuming Harry's form?" Griphook asked suspiciously.

"Because, I am known dead, and it wouldn't do at all to have a dead man walk the streets of Diagon Alley, especially when there is so much to lose at this stage. No one can know that Lily and I are alive. Especially not the Order of the Phoenix..." James said darkly.

"Why did you abandon your son?" Griphook demanded angrily, rising from his chair.

"Dumbledore told us that he was dead." James said bitterly, looking at the floor to hide his hatred filled eyes.

"Dumbledore told you that Harry was dead?" Griphook repeated in disbelief. "Why?"

"The same reason he told Harry that we were dead, when he knew we were alive. The same reason he locked Sirius away in Azkaban for a crime he knew he was innocent of." James said angrily. "To get us out of the way."

"For what?" Griphook asked as though he barely dare think about it.

"That's what I'm going to find out..." James said quietly. "A lot of lives have been destroyed... Dumbledore will be made to answer for his actions."

There was a long pause of silence between the two as each pondered dark thoughts about the conversation just past. Griphook could hardly believe the man sitting before him was his former client and friend. The news of the Potter's deaths had saddened him greatly all those years ago, and now he had come to find out that it was all a hoax. They had never been dead to begin with. And although this thought brought him great joy, confusion and slight anger came with it, even after James' explanation. Griphook looked up at James and sighed.

"Where is Harry?"

"He is safe now. He was badly tortured and beaten, but with Lily's help, he is recovering well."

"Death Eaters?" Griphook inquired.

James shook his head. "His Uncle." He said painfully.

Griphook nodded grimly. "I should have known."

James sighed. "We never in our wildest dreams intended on Harry going to Lily's sister..."

"Why doesn't he come forward, and let everyone know he's ok?" Griphook inquired desperately.

"He's not ready." James said quietly, "And we implore you Griphook, as a loyal friend of the Potter family, please, aid us in our time of need."

Griphook let out a reluctant sigh. "What do you need?"

"You will be aware, if you have been following that," James nodded towards the Prophet on Griphook's desk. "That Hermione Granger is the major suspect in regards to Harry's disappearance?"

Griphook nodded.

"Then you will also be aware that Dumbledore has set his bloodhounds after her, and has enlisted the services of Fudge and 20 of his most senior Aurors to help track her and Harry down." James continued.

"Yes. I saw that today... But what does that have to do with me?"

"We need you to help us *change* Fudge's mind about searching for Hermione and Harry." James said darkly.

"And exactly how are we supposed to do that? The Wizarding community is crying out for justice over this disappearance, they want answers. Fudge won't back down on the search lightly, his title at the ministry depends on finding Harry alive and well and returning him to the people." Griphook said skeptically.

"I have one word for you Griphook." James said with a sly grin.
"Blackmail."

Griphook raised his eyebrows alarmingly high. "Extortion is a serious crime, Mr. Potter."

"Indeed it is, Griphook. That's why we don't intend on getting caught." James replied calmly. "When I leave this building I will walk through Diagon Alley for several minutes un-hooded, allowing myself to be seen by many witnesses. Once people have seen that Harry Potter is alive and well, and that rumor spreads, the hype about his impending fate should die down somewhat. However I don't believe that will be enough to deter Dumbledore and the Ministry from the search for Harry and Hermione. This is where blackmailing Fudge comes into play. Dumbledore, without the Ministry is a small force we have more hopes of eluding. Once Fudge withdraws his Aurors, Hermione, Harry, Lily and Myself will be much safer than we are right now."

"And if Fudge doesn't buy into our Blackmailing scheme?" Griphook inquired.

"He will." James said darkly. "This is why we came to you. I need all the dirt you can dig up on Fudge by dusk."

"And how will I pass on this information?" Griphook asked curiously.

"Owl, of course." James said with a small grin.

James withdrew his wand and flicked it casually, and the next thing Griphook knew there was a great crack and a rustle of feathers. A tawny owl swooped down and landed softly on his desk, looking extremely put out. It glared at James then proceeded to groom itself fiercely, apparently as it had been doing in the moments before it was summoned. It ruffled its feathers indignantly as James reached out a hand to pet it, and he grinned, withdrawing his hand.

"This is Postumus." James said with a grin, "Send him along when you are ready. He knows how to find us."

Postumus squawked in indignation, turning his back on James as he rose from his chair. "There is also another matter Harry wished you to

take care of. More of a financial matter." He added, noting the look of horror on Griphook's face.

The little goblin's eyes lit up at the mention of money. "What can I do, Sir?"

"Harry wishes to cease control of the Muggle company Grunnings, it's a drill company in Little Whinging. His exact words to you were; 'I don't care what it takes, find every single shareholder and buy them out'."

"A drill company, Sir?" Griphook inquired, the light gone from his eyes.

"The company his beloved Uncle works for." James clarified in a dark tone.

"Ah, I see." Griphook said in an enlightened tone. "Well in that case, I'll get right on it Sir."

"Thank you, Griphook." James said gratefully. "Also I'll be sending you the papers on the property Harry has just bought control of."

"Which is?"

"His beloved Uncle's house." James replied with a snicker.

"He bought that house?" Griphook asked, astounded.

"Bought the mortgage for the house from my bank, so in reality, yes." James replied proudly.

Griphook gave James a sly grin, "Like father like son, I see."

James returned the grin silently, then turned and walked towards the door. He stopped briefly before dragging it open and turned to Griphook.

"Remember, anything you can find before dusk."

"As you wish, Sir." Griphook replied, "It's – It's good to see you again, Sir." He added with a sad smile.

"I am glad to see you again as well, my old friend." James replied in a soft tone.

"Give my regards to Harry, won't you?" The goblin asked quietly.

"Of course, Griphook. Do not worry, he'll be in to see you before long, once everything is taken care of..."

"Good," Griphook said sadly as James exited the room, "Good..."

"I don't see why this is necessary." Remus said as he lounged back in a chair outside Florean Fortescue's ice cream parlor. "Hermione is a smart girl, she's not about to parade herself down the streets of Diagon Alley, is she?"

"Perhaps she is banking on us believing she is smarter than that." Tonks said wisely, taking another spoonful of her third sundae. "I'm going to be sick at this rate."

"Slow down then," Shacklebolt said irritably. "I still think its absurd that we're chasing a 16 year old girl, Harry's best friend no less. We should be looking at the Deatheaters."

"I tend to agree." Remus said with a frown. "Hermione has no idea where Harry is. Her interrogation showed me that much. She had nothing to do with his disappearance, but Dumbledore is convinced that she is responsible. The only thing that will benefit her from being caught is that we can prove her innocence to him once and for all. The investigation of her house showed nothing."

Tonks snorted into her sundae. "Prove her innocence? To him? Remus... the man is on a witch hunt. I don't know what he's got against Hermione, but there is no way he's gong to let it slide."

"There was some inconsistencies in her story, I'll give him that. But I don't think it's anything to do with the fact that she murdered Harry in cold blood or sold him to Voldemort, I think it might be more to do with why she had gone to see him in the first place." Remus said thoughtfully.

"What are you thinking?" Tonks asked slyly.

"What's been obvious all along; She's in love with him." Remus replied simply.

"Why didn't she just tell Dumbledore that then? Or us, why didn't she tell us?" Tonks asked in disbelief, shaking her head.

'She's hardly about to trust us after we've shown we'll go to any lengths to get the truth out of her," Remus said with a sigh, "She may have been too proud to announce her feelings to us, or she may have realized that we would not believe her even if she did tell the truth."

"Dumbledore at least," Tonks corrected him, "He won't rest until he has Hermione's head on a stick."

"Yet he's ordered us to sit here, outside this shop, incognito, to eat ice cream after ice cream for twelve hours in hopes of spotting something out of the ordinary." Remus said with a bemused grin.

'Meanwhile, several more disappearances are happening every day, bodies are turning up all over the place and he has the gall to say there is no possible way this is a Deatheater attack. His disappearance is consistent with several others we have seen, but no one seems to care about that piece of information, do they?" Shacklebolt said bitterly.

"Perhaps he's finally gone round the twist." Remus suggested helpfully.

"More ice cream boys and girls?" Florean had appeared again and his proclamation nearly reduced Tonks to tears.

"Are you alright dear?" He asked in concern.

"Oh, I..."

"She's fine, she just loves your ice cream, that's all..." Kingsley replied kindly.

"Ah." Florean said with a proud, flattered smile, "Another round of sundaes on the house, then."

"You're too kind." Remus said with a smile as his stomach gurgled ominously.

As Florean disappeared back into the parlor Kingsley rearranged the Daily Prophet loudly and shook it as he began to read the inner pages. Tonks belched loudly, preparing some room for the imminent arrival of her forth sundae. The wizards at the table next to theirs gasped in shock and began furiously whispering amongst each other and casting Tonks fleeting looks. Remus groaned and hide his face behind an open hand as Tonks looked around perplexed.

"What?" She asked absently.

"Must you do that?" Kingsley asked in disgust as he peered over the top of the paper at Tonks. "You're attracting unwanted attention."

"Sorry." Tonks replied testily, "If you weren't stuffing me full of ice cream I might not have the urge too."

"That's what vanishing charms are for, Nymphadora." Kingsley said in exasperation.

"Any news?" Remus asked Kingsley swiftly, seeing the dangerous look in Tonks' eyes.

Shacklebolt grunted and handed Remus the paper, opened to a page with the headline;

Daily Prophet, 26th of July, 1996

DARK MARK LEADS TO DISCOVERY OF FIVE BODIES

In the latest in a splurge of attacks, Ministry officials discovered five bodies under the watch of the Dark Mark last night. A witch, a wizard and three small children were discovered dead in their home at approximately 10pm last night, after Aurors were alerted to sightings of the Dark Mark hovering in the sky above the outskirts of London. The names of the victims are yet to be released, but Ministry officials

say that the family was known for their opposition to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Officials at the scene refuse to state the cause of death, but state it is evident that the Cruatius curse was used in the attack.

"This is a grossly heinous crime that will not go un-investigated. We will find the Deatheaters responsible for this attack and they will be brought to justice." Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge stated after hearing of the seventh attack in three days.

When asked if he thought Harry Potter's disappearance could be related to the increase of Deatheater activity of late, the Minister only said "We are not ruling anything out at this stage."

The names of the latest victims will be released once their immediate families are contacted.

"Any idea who they were?" Remus asked quietly.

"I'm working on it. Word is the father was one of the Unspeakables at the ministry. Dumbledore's been keeping me so tied up in this wild goose chase that I've barely had time to... Remus?" Kingsley had trailed off suddenly when Remus rose sharply from his seat and squinted into the distance. "Remus, what is it?"

Remus sniffed the air lightly. A familiar scent floated on the wind. His eyes were fixed on a point further down the alley where several people were walking about examining shop windows. As he looked closer he saw that a few of those people had noticed something in the street, and were whispering excitedly to each other. He sniffed the air again, catching the familiar scent and froze as his eyes at last found what they were looking for. The people were not looking at something, but someone.

"Stay here." Remus said abruptly as he strode toward the end of the alley swiftly.

"Remus?" Tonks called after him questionably.

As James stepped out of Gringotts he felt very pleased with how events were going so far. Griphook was doing everything in his power to find incriminating evidence against Fudge, Grunnings was in the process of being bought out and now he only had to stamp his approval on the sale of the mortgage for Number 4, Privet Drive, and all would be going according to plan. James took a deep breath. It was time. The riskiest part of the operation was about to begin. As he lowered his hood he recalled Harry's words; '*Do a little tour around the alley, once a few people have seen me alive and well, get out of there...*'

James had figured it all out when he had entered the alley. From the moment he left Gringotts he would lower his hood and walk up and down the main alley, once each way, perusing the shop windows. Then, when he reached Gringotts again, he would double back, enter a desolate little side street about half way down the main runway, and apparate out. According to his calculations, he would have at least ten minutes in which he would be safe. If his plan went to custard, he could always apparate out immediately.

James took a deep breath and began his walk down the alley, a glimpse into what Harry's life must have been like since the day he defeated Voldemort. James went relatively unnoticed for several minutes, that is until a young witch looked him directly in the eye and squealed. James moved onward hurriedly. Trying to ignore the people around him, he realized that not much about Diagon Alley had changed since he had come here with his parents as a child. The Magical Menagerie, Gambol and Japes, Ollivanders... They were all exactly as he remembered them. But James' attention was inevitably drawn back to the crowd that he had attracted, and he soon realized that he would never make his original planned out route without being captured.

"Gawain!" Heaved an exhausted looking wiry wizard who had just rushed into the head Auror's office. "It's Potter, he's been sighted!"

"Where?" Gawain Robards replied gruffly, getting to his feet so quickly the wiry young man jumped.

"D- Diagon Alley, Sir."

"Diagon Alley?" Robards repeated in surprise. "Are you certain this is true?"

"Positive Sir, we've had numerous reported sightings, more coming in by the second..."

"Scrimgeour sure picked the perfect time to go on leave." Robards muttered. "Assemble home based A squad, now. Get them here immediately!"

"Yes Sir." The young man replied, hurrying away frantically again.

Robards paced his office anxiously, awaiting his team. He had been doing Scrimgeour's job as Head of Auror Office for three weeks now, while the senior wizard took some well earned time off, boy had he missed out on some excitement. Robards new if he was the one to bring Harry in, to capture this Granger girl, that he would have a very strong case for promotion. Gawain Robards was a very ambitious man, and he would let nothing stand in the way of his rise up the food chain.

James began to walk back towards Gringotts slowly, that's when the whispering began. That's when James found himself feeling terribly sympathetic that Harry had to put up with this sort of nonsense on a day to day basis.

"Harry Potter."

"Look! Harry Potter..."

"Is that Harry Potter?"

"Someone contact the Ministry, It's Harry Potter..."

"Get the Aurors..."

"Sweet Merlin... Harry Potter is alive!"

James tried to pass off apparent disinterest, but honestly wasn't sure if he had managed to pull it off. He found the constant nattering behind his back very off putting, and he resolved himself to turn down the empty side street as soon as he came too it. He passed Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor, Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions, Flourish and Blotts and the Stationary shop before at last coming to the alleyway. By this stage the whispers following him were almost deafening, and he knew he had to leave now if he ever wished too. He did not hear the single pair of footsteps chasing him down the Alley. His mind was elsewhere...

Remus had shot off down the alley before Tonks could even hope for an answer about where he was going. The boy he had seen seemed content to stroll the alley, ignoring the attention he was attracting. Remus quickened his pace. Thirty feet from his target he realized that the boy was also slightly quickening his pace. He increased his speed. As he started to move through the crowd of whispering, pointing witches and wizards, he realized that his eyes had not failed him. Harry Potter was now ten feet ahead of him, turning down a desolate street in the alley.

'No...' Remus thought desperately as he tore around the corner into the same street and came to a sudden halt. The boy was standing mere feet from him and was preparing to apparate. James stood with his back to Remus. To Remus, Harry looked remarkably well for someone rumored dead or worse. He was robed, showing good speed on foot and as it were, appeared to have nothing wrong with him. Yet still, something about this seemed strange to Remus, something seemed very wrong. James had not seen Remus' hasty approach, nor was he in the slightest bit aware of his presence until a familiar voice rang out.

"Harry, wait!" Remus called as he moved forward a step.

James stopped suddenly and turned to look upon the face who owned the familiar voice that had just rung through the alley. When his eyes found Remus' face, they widened in surprise. Although the fourteen years had aged Remus significantly, James had immediately recognized his old friend. James could not help but grin with surprise

and relief to see Remus alive and well. The werewolf was the last person James had expected to run into in Diagon Alley that day.

"Remus." He said smiling, temporarily forgetting he appeared as Harry.

"Harry." Remus said relieved. "Where have you been? Are you alright?"

James was on the verge of figuring out how to answer those questions when he heard something that alarmed him greatly.

"Which way did he go?" an important sounding voice came to James' ears.

"Down there!"

"Was he alone?"

"A man chased after him not long ago."

"Quickly. Don't startle the boy whatever you do!"

"Yes Sir!"

"Remus you must come with me, immediately." James said desperately.

"Why Harry? What's wrong?" Remus asked, perplexed.

"Remus please. We must go!" James cried in panic.

"Is someone after you Harry?" Remus asked suspiciously.

"You could say that." James replied anxiously, "Please Remus, I will explain everything if you will just come with me now!"

"This way. Hurry. He may have already gone!" the distant voice came again, causing James to fidget nervously.

"Harry, we should get you to St. Mungos. You're traumatized." Remus said calmly, moving forward in a non threatening manor.

James cried out in exasperation, then calmed, looking up at Remus with a pain-filled expression in his eyes. "I am truly sorry about this, My old friend. *Petrificus Totalus!*"

For a split second Remus looked upon Harry in horror before he froze solid and began to fall toward the ground. James rushed forward hastily and caught him inches from the ground, before giving him a saddened look.

"I'm sorry, my old friend, but it really was necessary." James said quietly, "Soon you will understand... When you see."

James sighed with exhaustion. That was not how things were meant to have gone. He gave the alley one last fleeting look before concentrating on arriving back in his home, and apparating out swiftly. Moments later, a squad of six Aurors came tramping around the corner, wands bared ready for action. When they came across the side street completely bare of any human life, the leader of the squad cried out in anger.

"Comb the area! I want Potter found and I want him now! You there, go back and interview those wizards on the street! Find out who it was who chased him and where he is now! I want answers!" Robards ordered.

"Yes Sir." Replied the five Aurors simultaneously.

"Let me get this straight." Dumbledore said darkly as he leaned back in an armchair at Number 12, Grimmauld Place. "Harry Potter was sighted in Diagon Alley, he walked up and down that Alley twice, and you failed to see him?"

"We were looking for Granger Sir." Shacklebolt said a little too bitterly.

"Silence." Dumbledore said commandingly. "Not only did you fail to see him, you managed to lose one of your comrades? How?"

"Remus saw something, Sir. He told us to wait where we were and he took off down the Alley. He never returned, Sir." Tonks informed him boldly.

"You're partner saw something out of the ordinary, commanded you to stay behind, and you obeyed him?" Dumbledore repeated.

"Yes Sir."

"Why would you obey such an idiotic command, Nymphadora?" Dumbledore asked silkily.

"I trust Remus Sir. He implied that he did not need us, so I trusted his judgement."

"As did I." Shacklebolt said in defense of Tonks.

"I see." Dumbledore replied. "And now that Remus is Missing in Action, do you still stand by your judgment?"

Shacklebolt and Tonks remained silent.

"What do you suppose happened to Remus, Kingsley?" Dumbledore asked slowly.

"I suppose," Kingsley replied darkly, "That the boy parading the streets of Diagon Alley was an impostor. I suppose that Remus saw who he thought was Harry, and, being close to the boy, trusted that it was him. I suppose that he confronted Harry, only to discover it wasn't the real Harry. That it was a Deatheater in disguise. I suppose that the impostor then took Remus captive, to prevent word escaping. I suppose that Remus is with Harry as we speak, dead or alive, I cannot say."

"What makes you believe that the Harry in Diagon Alley was an impostor?" Dumbledore asked, a fiery glint in his eyes.

"All the reports said that Harry appeared in good health." Shacklebolt said as if it were obvious. "No limp, no signs of being harmed, no scars other than the usual lightning strike. What we saw in Number Four Privet Drive totally contradicts those reports. Harry would have been near death when he disappeared, he could not have been completely healed by now, even if he were in the hands of a healer."

"I see." Dumbledore said again, thoughtfully. "And you, Nymphadora, what is your theory?"

"I agree that the Harry in Diagon Alley must have been an impostor. Why they were there, I have no idea. Perhaps to throw us off the trail, Perhaps to draw out Aurors to pick off. I believe Kingsley is right. Remus would have confronted Harry, but whether he was snatched by the impostor or waiting Deatheaters I haven't decided."

Dumbledore nodded. "And the Prophet has no idea that Remus disappeared?"

"None." Kingsley replied.

"Good." Dumbledore said thoughtfully. "We will need to get our stories straight before we go public with the new information. I knew Hermione was a smart girl, but I never thought her capable of something this intelligent. She is very calculating..."

"What?" Tonks said in alarm.

"Don't you see? Polyjuice Potion, Nymphadora. The girl has it all figured out. Only she didn't throw us off the scent as she intended. All she managed to do was lengthened the term she will get in Azkaban by several years..."

Daily Prophet, 27th July, 1996

BOY-WHO-LIVED ALIVE: POTTER SIGHTED IN DIAGON ALLEY

It was with great surprise that residents of Diagon Alley recognized Harry Potter perusing the shop windows in the early hours of yesterday morning. Potter was first spotted outside the Magical Menagerie at approximately 9.15am yesterday, examining the contents of the shop's window. This first sighting was followed by a flood of reports being sent to the ministry of Magic, who received no less than 200 hundred reported sightings of the boy within 10 minutes. Despite a team of six Aurors being dispatched immediately under the leadership of acting Head of the Auror Office, Gawain Robards,

Potter vanished without a trace just moments before the squad arrived on the scene.

"We have not given up on finding Harry." Robards commented from the scene yesterday morning. "If anything this sighting gives us new hope. Potter appeared in good health to all those witnesses who saw him, and we can only hope he left Diagon Alley on his own accord. We do not know what possessed Harry to show himself in Diagon Alley, but we hope that whatever the reason was, it will lead him to show himself again, and perhaps then we will be able to get some answers."

But after talking to several witnesses at the scene, this reporter is not so sure that Harry will be capable of showing himself again. Several reports claim that a 'ragged looking man' was seen chasing after Potter just moments before the Aurors arrived. The man ran down the same Alley Potter was seen entering, and when Aurors infiltrated the area, there was no one to be found. Had Harry Potter managed to escape his captors, only to be recaptured in front of a bustling crowd in the heart of wizarding Britain?

Witnesses say they heard someone casting a spell down the alley, and then there was a loud crack, like that of someone apparating, shortly after. Auror Robards refused to comment to the Prophet on the speculation of a second abduction, merely informing us that his team of Aurors were doing everything in their power to discover what had really happened to Potter, and where he is now. While many say this sighting comes as a sigh of relief to the wizarding world, there are others who fear something far more sinister is at work.

Aurors continue to scour Diagon Alley in attempts to find any clues that might help them with their inquiries. Witnesses have been asked to stay behind and give their accounts of events in writing to help with the investigation. Meanwhile, hunt for missing fugitive Hermione Granger and her parents Jonathan and Julia remains fruitless, as there have been no further sightings or any solid leads.

"We can only assume they have gone to ground." Robards said yesterday, "My teams are continuing their search of the Granger

home and are investigating all possible leads. We will find Hermione Granger."

More news as it comes.

Chapter Fifteen: And Nothing Else Matters...

Morning was in full flare outside the Potter family mansion sending streams of warm light through the glass panes in Harry's bedroom. He had been awake all night. The prospect of sending his father into Diagon Alley, the heart of wizarding London, on his own without protection troubled him greatly. Harry's bare shoulders warmed to the touch of the sun and he rolled over to face the windows, hoping once again that upon waking he would be able to miraculously see. Instead he saw the strong glow of a magical presence, that of his father. Harry frowned.

"Morning Father. You're bright and early." Harry said in a troubled voice.

"Morning. How are you feeling, Harry?" James asked quietly.

"Brilliant, apart from being blind, I mean." Harry said with a small grin.

"Pain gone?"

"Yup. Mum said my body's completely healed other than my eyes." Harry replied with a hint of cheerfulness. "She can't believe how quickly I've recovered. I mean sure I have a few scars here and there, but she said my magic must have really kicked in."

"That's great news." James said with a smile. "We'll have you gang bashing Dumbledore in no time."

Harry laughed, then frowned slightly. "Well, walking is still a little difficult. Then there is the other matter..."

James frowned, not understanding his meaning. "What other matter?"

"The matter of my magical core having been destroyed." Harry said swiftly, letting the words tumble out of his mouth before he could prevent them.

"You - What?" James asked in surprise.

"When my magic broke free, it destroyed my core. It means I can no longer use a wand. It also means I need to learn how to focus my magic to be able to use it." Harry said shifting slightly in his bed. "Don't worry... I've been shown how... Now it's just a matter of practicing until I can do it without great concentration... Catch is... I couldn't start attempting to rectify my magic until I was back at full health, and now that I am -"

"Let me get this straight -" James said cutting him off suddenly, "You're completely powerless at this moment?"

"No, not completely powerless." Harry corrected him, "I'm more powerful than ever, I just need to learn to harness that power. I need to train it."

"Harry..." James said in disbelief, "How on earth do you know your core's been destroyed?"

"That's a very long story Father..." Harry said, hoping to throw him off.

"I have a very long time..." He replied with just as much determination, folding his arms and leaning back casually.

"I died, Dad." Harry said with a sigh, realizing he wouldn't let him away with it.

"What?" James blurted out in shock.

"Well- I didn't really die... Sirius said I was hovering between the realms of life and death. He made me come back."

"Sirius?" James repeated, perplexed, "Harry, what are you talking about?"

"I was with Sirius. I can't explain it Dad. I thought I was dead, but he told me I had to go back, I wanted to see you and Mum, but he told me I couldn't... now I know why. At first I thought you just didn't want to see me, but now I realize he was trying to tell me that you were alive."

"Sirius-" James said in a dawning voice, looking at his hands. "God he must be so angry. He must feel so betrayed."

"He wasn't angry father. I think he was more sad. I guess he was looking forward to being reunited with you after so long, only to find out that you were back here where he should be..." Harry trailed off quietly.

James dropped down to sit on Harry's bed and placed his head in his hands. "Sirius was robbed of his life, Harry. He should be here with us, not there. I never got to say goodbye... If it's the last thing I ever do, I will avenge his death."

"And I will be right there beside you when you do." Harry said quietly. "I won't let Sirius' death be swept under the rug. But you'll have to wait until I can control my power..."

"So... Sirius told you your core was destroyed?" James asked slowly.

"No, he took me to someone who could explain it." Harry replied with a sigh.

"Who?"

"Myrddin Emrys." Harry said quietly.

"What?" James said faintly, "He took you to Merlin?"

"Yes." Harry replied simply. "He told me that I had to carry on, that I was the only one who could finish it..."

"Sirius Black is buddies with Merlin?" James said in disbelief, "What the hell does he miss me for?"

"The point is," Harry continued, he would have rolled his eyes if that were possible, "that I am in no condition to face the Wizarding World, Voldemort or Dumbledore at this point in time. I need to hone my abilities. I need to prepare for what is coming."

James nodded gravely. "Of course, but Harry? When the time comes, I'll be right there next to you as well."

Harry nodded and a small smile graced his face. "Thank you."

"Well," James said abruptly, changing the subject, "Hermione's had me up since before dawn placing all these charms on me, apparently we could pass for twins now."

"Great." Harry said sitting up suddenly, "Hopefully it's good enough to fool Griphook and random members of the Wizarding public."

James grinned. "Oh it will be. You just concentrate on fixing your magic, let me take care of the rest."

"Good luck." Harry said grimly, patting his father on the shoulder. "Be careful."

James grinned. "Don't worry about me. Being a marauder has had its advantages. I won't get caught."

Harry smiled. "Just as well. You might have some explaining to do once that aging potion wears off."

James laughed. "Talk to Griphook, leave Gringotts, remove hood, parade alley, apparate out. Got it. I'll be fine."

"Thanks for doing this, Dad." Harry said gratefully.

James smiled ruffling his son's hair. "Anytime kid, anytime."

There was a loud crack, and the glowing form of James Potter disappeared from Harry's vision, leaving behind only a sense of foreboding and a ringing in the boy's ears.

Lily examined her work carefully. Perfect. She had been holed up in her office for almost two days, ever since they had thought of the plan. The contacts that sat before her, held in place by a strange looking contraption with steel hands, glistened in the light. They were perfect in shape and form, and as far as Lily could tell, they were in perfect working order. All that remained before they would be ready for testing was one more charm. She had worked tirelessly since Hermione and she had come up with the idea from Harry's

suggestion. Hermione had helped her frequently, but appeared much more interested in looking after Harry, where she spent most of her time. Lily smiled. She could not blame Hermione for being so concerned about Harry, she would have been the same if James had been in his position.

She was excited, she had to admit, about presenting the contact lenses to her son. Of all the things she had worked determinedly on in her life, this was the one she was most dedicated to. She owed her son that much, after unknowingly deserting him for 14 years, he deserved her dedication. She would not accept that Harry may be blind for the rest of his life, her son would see again, if it was the last thing she ever did. These magical contacts, her invention, her sweat and blood, would be the end of his disability, once and for all.

Lily lightly prodded the left lens with her wand sending a shower of sparks shooting off it sharply. She nodded satisfied, jotting down a few notes on a nearby piece of parchment. Her thoughts strayed momentarily to James, who was at this moment perusing the shop windows in Diagon Alley, a place where she hadn't been for over a decade. She wondered whether the disguise they had created for the occasion had been successful enough to do the job intended. A pang of worry hit her heart briefly before she shook it off and resumed her examination of the contacts. If all went according to plan, Harry would be able to see before nightfall.

Hermione had disappeared about half an hour ago to check on Harry, Lily knew that the girl couldn't bare the thought of Harry being alone in the permanent darkness his uncle had reduced him to. Hermione's parents and older sister spent most of their time exploring the Potters' mansion, at every turn finding something more profoundly magical than the last object, also more profoundly alarming. Anna had come to amuse herself greatly by playing a deadly game of 'Taunt the bewitched frying pan'. More than once James had had to rescue her after finding the frying pan hovering ominously above her head when she was completely oblivious to its presence. Lily sighed and found herself wondering if all Muggles were so troublesome.

She lightly prodded the right lens in the same manner as she had the left, and watched the same amount of sparks emit from the surface.

She smiled happily, things were going very well in the creation of these lenses. The magical pupils contracted and dilated with changes in the light just as Lily had hoped they would. Lily looked up at her watch for a moment, letting her eyes flicker over its face and realized that it was getting late. By her calculations James should be home by now, she stowed her wand in her pocket, stretched out her back and yawned, before retiring to go and check on Harry and Hermione, and see how James had got on.

Time ticked by slowly at Potter manor. Hermione had curled herself up next to Harry in his bed, who had his arms around her lovingly. Her head rested gently on his shoulder as she let out a contented sigh. Harry smiled, he could feel her chest rising and falling against his with every gentle breath she took. Her hands slid over top of his lightly as she entwined her fingers with his.

"Thought of any names yet?" Harry asked suddenly.

"Names?" Hermione repeated in surprise. "Well I..."

"How about Hubert?" Harry asked seriously.

"Hubert?" Hermione repeated attempting not to sound incredibly alarmed.

Harry laughed. "I'm kidding. Don't sound so worried."

"I'm not," Hermione said quickly, "It's just..."

"Just what?" Harry asked, sounding slightly worried.

"It's just... what are we going to do, Harry?" Hermione asked desperately, "How are we going to do this?"

Harry sighed softly and kissed Hermione's forehead, brushing the strands of her hair out of her eyes gently and pushing them behind her ear. As his fingers brushed her cheek he felt them streak through the trail of a tear and smudge it across her skin. He squeezed her tighter to his chest wrapping both arms around her body protectively as she returned the embrace.

"Things weren't supposed to happen this way, 'Mione." Harry said softly.

"I know." She said quietly through her tears. "I'm sorry..."

"Sorry?" Harry repeated in alarm, "Are you crazy? Hermione I'm not sorry for anything that has happened. I'm not sorry that I was beaten to an inch of my life, it's kick started a chain of events that has changed my life. I'm not sorry that I finally told you I love you, and I'm definitely not sorry that you're carrying my child, because I love you Hermione, and I want to have a family of my own with you. It's just that if we had have had time to think about things, I would not have wanted to bring our child into the world so soon. Not now when Voldemort is such a high threat, and with our uncertainty about Dumbledore ... I don't want to lose you Hermione. I don't want to lose you or our baby."

Hermione smiled, her eyes shining with unshed tears. "You're not going to lose me, Harry." she said softly.

"You don't understand Hermione. If anyone finds out that you're pregnant and that we're together you're going to be his main target. I can't let that happen." Harry said quietly. "I won't let him hurt you to hurt me, that's why no one can know, not yet."

Hermione nodded. "I understand." She said quietly.

"Hermione, I love you. I love you and our baby. I don't know how we are going to get through this, but we will. We made this happen, our son will be born, I only hope I can finish all of this before he arrives." Harry said with a small frown.

"Our son?" Hermione said with a slightly cocked eyebrow and the hint of a smile.

"Our son." Harry repeated firmly. "He's going to live to hear tales of how Voldemort was destroyed. He's going to grow up with a generation that does not know the fear associated with that name."

Hermione smiled, then suddenly burst out into a giggle. Harry turned to her in surprise.

"What?"

"Hubert Potter." She said with a grin, "No son of the Savior of the Wizarding World will have such a ridiculous name."

Harry smiled, then turned to her and gave her a knowing look. "No, but I would like his mother to carry my last name, at least."

Hermione startled and looked upon him in surprise as the full extent of his words hit her head on. The world seemed to move in slow motion as she examined his face to see if he was serious or not. Harry grinned and nodded, and Hermione's mouth fell wide open. She had been dreaming about this moment since halfway through her first year of Hogwarts, and now that it had come, she could not believe her ears. She could not imagine why, when he had so much else going on, that he would propose to her like this.

"You – You want to marry me?" she asked in shock.

Harry laughed. "Is it such a laughable notion?"

"Wh- I no, just... You want to marry me." She said in disbelief.

Harry laughed again. "I've pictured you as my wife since our second year at Hogwarts. Now more than ever I want you as close to me as possible. When this is all over, I want you to be here with me, so we can carry on, together, with our son."

Hermione looked up into Harry's face and smiled, her skin shining with tears. "Of course I will, Of course I will marry you Harry Potter." She said reaching up to wrap her arms around his neck tightly. "You're everything, All I want. You're all I need. I've always been in love with you Harry, to the point where I believed you could never love me back as much as I love you. And now, in this moment, all my dreams have come true."

"Oh, but I do love you, Hermione." Harry replied kissing her softly.

"I know," She whispered softly as she kissed him back, "I know."

Harry smiled, stroking her cheek gently. "My only regret is that I cannot give you the large and glorious wedding you should have. I'm sorry Hermione, but no one would make it out alive. We'd all be killed without a second thought."

"It's ok Harry." Hermione smiled kissing him softly, "As long as you're there, that's all that counts."

Harry laughed quietly, running his fingers through her hair gently. "Well, that you shall have. So just when exactly would you like this wedding to take place?"

"Hmm..." She contemplated with mock thoughtfulness. "Tomorrow?"

Harry laughed, cocking an eyebrow. "Well I was actually hoping I would be able to see you on our wedding day, love."

Hermione grinned. "Oh I suppose we could put it off a few days then. Before the end of summer though, alright?"

Harry smiled kissing her softly, "As you wish."

Hermione kissed him back receptively, running her fingers through the back of his hair. Harry could feel Hermione's heart beating swiftly as she pressed her chest against his own. Running his hands down her sides he felt her shiver and drew her closer to him, kissing her more deeply than before. Hermione wrapped her arms around his neck and leaned back, so that Harry was leaning over her and drew him closer. Harry broke their kiss momentarily and gave her a sheepish grin.

"What?" She asked raising an eyebrow.

"You know, this got us into a lot of trouble the first time..."

Hermione laughed. "Well it can't get us into any more trouble than we are already in, can it?" She said bashfully.

"It might," Harry said regretfully as he kissed her lips softly, "Especially with your father lurking around out there."

Hermione looked toward the bedroom door where Harry was pointing at let out an exasperated sigh. "I suppose you're right..."

"You're just going to have to resist my incredible body for a little longer I'm afraid 'Mione." Harry said wistfully.

Hermione nudged him playfully in the ribs as she laughed. "It's going to be oh so hard to do."

"I know," He said with a reluctant shrug, "but what can you do?"

Hermione laughed kissing him deeply before resting her head on his bare chest and letting out a happy sigh.

"I'm so excited Harry, when can we tell everyone? I'm dying to see Anna's face..." Hermione asked smiling widely.

"Yes, it should keep the bloodhound off of my back for a while." Harry muttered with a smirk as he recollected his encounter with Hermione's older sister, "She's pretty protective of you, you know."

Hermione shrugged lightly. "I'm still the three year old girl she has to look out for in her eyes. She means well..."

"I know. I'm glad you have her around. I wish I had had a brother or sister..."

Hermione frowned slightly taking his hand and running her fingers through his gently. "Ron's like a brother to you, isn't he?"

"Yeah..." Harry said with a small grin, "Ron's amazing... I hope he's alright, wherever he is. I hope Dumbledore hasn't got to him already..."

"I hope so too." Hermione said quietly. "I can't wait to tell Ron either. But Anna, she's going to flip out."

Harry laughed hearing the excitement in her voice. "Well not just yet, Dad's in Diagon Alley remember, I'd like to wait until he's back before we announce things."

Hermione sighed slightly and gave a small smile, "Of course. I wonder how he's doing?"

"So do I..." Harry said thoughtfully with a frown, "He's been gone a long time now. He should be back soon, I just hope he didn't get caught. I know things would have gone fine with Griphook, but walking the Alley? I just hope he was careful."

"Don't worry, Harry. He's going to be fine." Hermione said consolingly. "Your father is a smart man."

Harry smiled. "Yeah, he is... but he should be back by now."

"Well," Lily said bustling into the room swiftly for a report. "how did it – Harry, where is your father?"

The look of fear that shot through Lily's eyes when she looked up to see James was not in the room was unmistakable to Hermione.

"He's not back yet..." Harry said frowning slightly. "He should be back by now..."

"He will be back." Hermione said firmly, "He's probably just enjoying grandstanding as Harry that's all."

Lily frowned, her heart beating faster than ever. "I hope you're right..." She said quietly. "I hope you're right..."

"Right." James said as he paced up and down the floor of the rundown old shack again, "Right..."

Leaning against a shabby wall Remus Lupin stood, immobilized, staring blankly at Harry before him. It had all happened so fast he was completely oblivious to being attacked by the boy he considered a most treasured nephew. Only when he was inches from the ground and caught by the boy did he realize what had happened. Harry had cast a full body bind curse on him, and then proceeded to apologize as he apparated away with him in tow. Some secret agent of the Order he was turning out to be, kidnapped by a 15 year old kid. He

was mortified at the thought of what Shacklebolt and Tonks would say when they realized he was missing.

"Well, the thing is..." James began running his hands through his hair in frustration. "As you are about to discover... that I'm well..."

The strangest thing to Remus, was the way in which Harry was acting. As soon as they had arrived in the place Remus recognized to be the shrieking shack, he had begun pacing the room and cursing himself under his breath. He had expected to be released immediately upon arriving to a private place. To his surprise, Harry did not reverse the curse, but left it active, keeping Remus paralyzed, not to mention highly confused. He seemed anxious, panicky, and slightly put out at being seen by himself. Despite all evidence to the contrary, Harry appeared in perfect health, and in no means did he appear to be held captive, or under any Imperius curse. Remus Lupin's mind professed himself to be highly confused by the events, and that was that on the matter.

Remus looked around the Shrieking Shack carefully. Nothing about it had changed since the night that he had followed Harry, Hermione, Ron and Sirius to this very room, only to discover the truth about Sirius' innocence. That night he had witnessed the return of one of the close knit group of school friends he had mourned the loss of several years before. That night he learned that he had presumed that wrong friend a traitor. Remus felt a jolt to his gut when he saw that Sirius' paw prints still graced the dusty floor, now covered with another inch of dust, but still imprinted further than the rest of the floor. His heart skipped an uncomfortable beat as a wave of grief washed over him. Why had Harry brought him here?

"You haven't changed in the slightest, Remus..." James settled on with a sigh, calming slightly as he looked upon his old friend who stared back in faint bewilderment.

It had only been a matter of weeks since Harry had last seen Remus, causing Remus to think the boy was possibly delusional. Maybe he had escaped his captors?

"Remus, I'm not Harry." James said finally. "I know I look like Harry, but I assure you, I'm not. The real Harry, he's currently recovering in

my home from a brutal attack by his Uncle. I would have taken you straight there, but then I realized that a lot needs to be explained before I can even think of putting you through the shock of what you will find there. Moony, my old friend... there is much you need to know, and I'm afraid I can't remove that curse until I am sure you understand, for what I am about to tell you will be the most preposterous thing that has ever graced your wolfish ears..."

An overwhelming feeling of dread crept over Remus as he stood, frozen to the spot. *Not Harry?* Remus cursed himself inside his head. Of course that would make sense. It explained why this Harry appeared to be in perfect health, why this Harry had panicked and cursed him when he had confronted him. However, it did not explain how this person knew he was a werewolf, or how he knew his marauder name, Harry would never have divulged that information to an enemy. Two of the other three people that knew of his persona were dead, and then there was Hermione and Ron. Ron, who was holed up in Grimmauld Place, and Hermione who was wanted in connection with Harry's disappearance. In Remus' mind, the only two people this impostor could be, were Hermione, or Peter...

"Nearly Fifteen years ago, Lily and I went into hiding-

Lily and I?

"-After being informed that we were at the top of Voldemort's hit list. That much you know, my old friend, and from what Harry tells me you now know that we switched secret keepers at the last minute to Peter instead of Sirius. But what remains a mystery to you and the rest of the world, is the events that took place on the night of October 31st, 1981." James sighed and paused, looking briefly at Remus with a saddened expression.

No- It can't be... James? That's impossible...

"For your version of events, the version that was told to you by Albus Dumbledore, is a complete falsification. One that I'll admit, at the time we agreed too- under false pretenses, may I add. For we too were lied too about the events that took place that night." James continued bitterly.

Remus' stare became even blander as he contemplated this statement.

"I am well aware Remus, that the only way you will come to believe me at this very moment in time without seeing Lily and Harry is to see for yourself the events that took place that night." James said with a sigh taking the tip of his wand to his temple, "So that is what we shall have to arrange."

James drew the tip of the wand carefully away from his temple, and with it came a long string of silvery substance that Remus recognized as a memory. If this was indeed James' memory, he would know it. James frowned and walked toward Remus, gently bringing the silvery thread to Remus' temple and using his wand to prod it in. As the thread disappeared into Remus' mind his eyes flashed a glowing silver and then went still as the images began to flash before him.

"James!" Lily's shrill voice came to his ears.

"Lily, Take Harry and go! It's him! Go! Run! I'll hold him off-" James shouted in reply frantically as he stumbled from the room.

The sound of a door bursting open reached his ears, and a high-pitched, cackling laughter rang through the house.

"No! I won't leave you!" Lily cried, thundering towards the room where James was.

"Lily go!" James roared from ahead of her, "Stupefy!"

"Silly boy. Do you really think you can stop me?" A low harsh voice came to his ears as the spell was deflected with ease. "I'm not here for you, it's the boy I want."

"Never!" James roared raising his wand, but not quickly enough.

"Crucio!" Voldemort roared.

James crumpled to the floor writhing in agony. Voldemort laughed, his high pitched, cold cruel laughter filling the room as Lily screamed.

Voldemort turned to look at Lily with a devilish smirk as he tortured her husband, who was clutching his head in horror.

"No! Petrificu -" Lily began.

"Stay down, stupid girl. Stupefy!" Voldemort cut across her.

Lily ducked just in time, and cast her eyes over to James who lay crumpled on the floor, dazed and confused. Voldemort followed her line of sight and snorted, seeing the weakened man whimper. He kicked out at James ribs, connecting and causing him to groan in agony. Voldemort looked up at Lily and snickered. Lily panicked and rushed to the foot of the staircase, blocking his path to Harry's room.

"Not Harry! Not Harry! Please not Harry!" she cried desperately.

"Stand aside, you silly girl... stand aside, now..." Voldemort said threateningly as he approached her.

Lily let out a wail of despair and shot a stunner towards the Dark Lord, who dismissed it casually with the flick of his wand. Lily gasped and backed up a few steps, blocking his path.

"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead-

Voldemort was laughing again, a laugh that held no emotion, only cruelty. "I don't want you-

"Not Harry, please... have mercy... have mercy..." Lily fired off the first jinx that came to her mind, but she needn't have bothered, it was deflected without any exertion.

Voldemort laughed at her feeble attempts to protect her son, her spells were weakened from her fear, her husband lay behind them still recovering from the Cruciatus curse, and his target was only feet away. His laughter rang shrill and cold, and the sound of it alone chilled Lily's blood and caused her to scream in despair.

"Not Harry!" She pleaded with him again and again, "Not Harry! Please - I'll do anything-

"Stand aside – stand aside, girl-" Voldemort ordered, his temper growing short. "I do not have time for these silly games."

"Never! I won't let you -"

"Stupefy!" Voldemort raised his wand swiftly to her chest.

A jet of red light soared from the tip of his wand with tremendous force and struck Lily dead on in the chest. A look of shock passed through her eyes as she was blasted back up the stairs several feet and landed with a dull thud. A cold flicker passed through Voldemort's eyes as he ascended the staircase, stepping over her stunned body that lay sprawled on the steps, and disappeared into the nursery at the far end of the landing.

James roused groggily to see his wife's lifeless body and no sign of Voldemort and panicked. He staggered to his feet, half running half stumbling up the few stairs to where her body lay took her face in his hands.

"Lily!" He yelled, getting a groaning response.

James heart leapt with joy as he fumbled for his wand, holding her head to his chest in a loving embrace. "Envervate!" He shouted.

Lily woke and sat up groggily, then all at once the events dawned on her. "Where is he?" she shouted, "Where is he?"

He scrambled to her feet pushing James away, only to have him grab her hand. "Invisibility charms, now." he said gravely.

Lily obeyed the command and they both cast the charms on each other, then tore up the staircase. Just as they reached the partially open door of the Nursery they saw the dark figure of Voldemort raise his wand and speak the spell they had so desperately tried to prevent. Just as Lily opened her mouth to scream something went horribly wrong – The room exploded with a flash of green light and James and Lily were thrown backwards...

The memory faded out.

Lupin stared in disbelief as the memory faded out and the new memory came into view. James and Lily waking, finding the house blown apart. Frantically searching the wreckage for Harry, finding no sign of him or Voldemort, resolving to enlist Dumbledore's help... Remus felt increasingly sick to his stomach as he watched his friends struggle to come to terms with what had taken place.

... "Dumbledore.." James breathed heavily, panic evident in his voice.

"James? Lily?" Dumbledore asked warily, he was ghostly pale. "Good Heavens, where have you been? I feared you were .."

"He found us... Voldemort... he found us..." he panted.

"I know..." Dumbledore said quietly.

"We can't find Harry..." James said urgently. "We looked everywhere... we can't find him..."

"Where were you, James?.. I've just been at Godric's Hollow.. You were nowhere in sight.. I thought he had killed you both.."

"Dumbledore.. What happened? Where is Harry? Where is my son?.." James pressed, dread welling up inside of his chest.

"Voldemort.. Voldemort found him. I'm sorry Lily.. James.. There was nothing you could have done.."

Remus' eyes widened in horror and his stomach clenched in despair.

"What?" James asked with a disbelieving laugh. "No- no he can't have..."

"I'm so very, very sorry James.."

"No- No.. Harry isn't dead..." Lily said with a laugh, which turned into a wail. "My Harry isn't dead!"

Tears began to prickle the werewolf's eyes, anger and hatred was welling up so strongly in his chest he was sure the pure force of it could loose his bonds. He watched as James grabbed Lily about the

waist as she collapsed against him, dissolving into tears. James' voice was paralyzed with grief, Remus could tell his eyes were trained on Dumbledore. Remus' heart wrenched as he watched his best friend, completely overwhelmed with shock. He felt numb. Remus knew at that moment James was blaming himself for the supposed death of his son, and Lily was beyond grief.

"Even if you had got there in time, If you had tried to stop him, he would have killed you too.. You know this.." Dumbledore said quietly.

"I would have died." James stated plainly. "I would have died before I let him take Harry.."

"I just don't want you blaming yourself for something that was out of your control."

James looked at Dumbledore, still in shock, clutching Lily tightly in his arms. "Don't you dare tell me that this was destiny.. No destiny would destroy the life of an innocent child.." He said as tears stung his eyes.

Dumbledore looked down, not replying, his usually twinkling eyes were dull and faded.

"Are you sure?" He urged the old man in despair. "Are you sure that he is dead..?"

"I moved the body myself.."

Remus watched as Lily moaned and buried her head in James neck. James' eyelids flickered closed in defeat. That was it, the final straw for Remus. The man had blatantly lied to James and Lily. Remus was so shocked that even if he had not been frozen with the spell, he would have been frozen with grief and disbelief. How could Dumbledore do such a thing? How could this wise old man ruin the lives of so many. Those five simple words had ruined the lives of an entire family. Lily burst into loud, uncontrollable sobs and James glared at Dumbledore, squeezing his wife to his chest tightly, protectively. He could not believe the old man in front of him, he could not believe that his son was dead. He was barely one year old... Dumbledore gave James a saddened look, and Remus' fury increased.

"How were you to know that Sirius would betray you? As far as you believed, you were safe..." Dumbledore consoled him.

"Sirius?" James repeated in confusion. "No... not Sirius..."

Dumbledore's eyes widened slightly and there was a flicker of a frown. "Sirius wasn't the Secret Keeper?"

"No... it was Peter." James said hollowly, "If we had made Sirius secret Keeper... none of this would have happened..."

"Sirius would have been too obvious, of course we would choose our best friend..." James said in frustration. "If only we had have chosen him..."

Remus' stomach gave a horrific lurch. Dumbledore had known all along that Peter Pettigrew had betrayed Lily and James, yet he had let Sirius rot in Azkaban? Sirius had been hounded for 14 years when Dumbledore knew he was innocent and could attest to it? Dumbledore stood by while Sirius was thrown in jail without a trial and led his friends and family to believe he had committed the crimes accused of him. James saw Remus' eyes flash angrily and he frowned sadly, running his hands over his face.

"You cannot dwell on what ifs' James. Harry is gone." Dumbledore said sternly. "Now you must decide where you stand."

"What do you mean?" James asked in surprise.

"The wizarding community is under the impression that both you and Lily died along side Harry..." Dumbledore pressed.

James glanced at Lily, whose eyes were still streaming silently. "What are you saying.." He asked cautiously.

"I am saying, you may either correct the world, tell them that you live.. or.."

"Or what?" James asked with a frown.

"Or start a new life... far from the wizarding world, away from the war and Voldemort.. and the reminders of your- failures." He said subtly, eyeing them carefully.

Remus watched James and Lily, in that one moment when they had been told of their son's death, the light had gone out of their eyes, and all happiness departed them. James looked down at his wife. Lily strengthened herself and stood upon her own two feet, wiping the tears from her cheeks. Looking up into her husband's eyes, she gave him a weak smile, which made her lips tremble. Remus felt physically ill knowing his friends had been so easily betrayed, so easily lied too, so easily manipulated...

"I can't do this anymore James.. We've been fighting and hiding and living in fear for too long. And now Harry is dead. The one thing we were trying to protect has been taken from us."

"But Lily.. can you really leave this all behind?"

"I will never be able to look anyone in the eyes again.. Not when they know that we lived yet Harry died.. We could have stopped him James.." Lily trailed off into silent tears.

"We'll have to go soon..."

"Very soon. If you are serious about this, we can't afford to let anyone see you.." Dumbledore reminded them.

"Of course.." James said trying to think but finding his brain was still numb and horror filled, "But where should we go?"

If he could have, Remus would have roared in frustration at seeing his grief stricken friends being so subtly manipulated by the meddling old fool. His eyes narrowed as Dumbledore made every effort to ensure Lily and James would be as far away from Harry as possible. His fingertips twitched slightly. James watched his friends reaction with new found grief, knowing now that he knew what had happened. That someone believed him...

A gleam of triumph shot through Dumbledore's eyes. "The world is a very large place, James. But I suggest that you go far, far away. You

run less risk of being spotted. And besides.. you need a break, both of you. Take Lily somewhere nice.. Somewhere warm."

Inside his head Remus snorted. 'Yes... Far far away. Anything to get you out of the way. James, oh how we have been mislead... How could we have all been so foolish?'

"I want to see Harry.. before we go.."

Remus snapped to attention. He was longing to see how Dumbledore would get out of this one.

"Lily I don't.." Dumbledore began hastily.

"I do too." James said firmly.

"I'm sorry, very sorry.. but I'm afraid It's just not possible.."

"I don't understand.. You said you moved the b.. you said you moved him?" James said in despair.

"His.. He was badly burnt.. James.. beyond recognition.." Dumbledore replied, his eyes burning with sympathy.

The memories ceased and left Remus in a state of shock. He looked up to see James looking at him gravely.

"Laxus Lingua..." James muttered pointing his wand at Remus' mouth.

At once the werewolf's mouth loosened and he found he was able to move his lips. He gasped for breath, as he had been unknowingly holding it in since discovering that Dumbledore had sent Sirius to Azkaban knowing he was innocent. He stretched out his jaw swiftly, bringing the feeling back to his face as he shook his head. Looking up he saw James staring at him with a peculiar expression on his face, mixed grief and joy.

"Remus?..." James inquired tentatively.

"James... I can't believe it- how can we have all been so easily mislead?" Remus replied, choking slightly on the lump of anger in his throat.

"Me? I was foolish to put my trust in that man." James said in despair.
"I should have known- I should have known that Harry was alive..."

"You cannot blame yourself James." Remus replied in a saddened voice, "How were you to know that Dumbledore was betraying us all?"

James snickered angrily. "I just should have known. He's my son, Remus. I should have refused to leave without seeing is body..."

"He manipulated your grief, James- yours and Lily's." Remus said consolingly. "James- You're all alive, you, Lily and Harry. Nothing else matters now... Now we know the truth we can make Dumbledore answer for it. You're all alive."

"I am sorry for the formalities, my old friend," James said abruptly changing the subject as he released Remus from the body bind curse.
"but honestly, would you have believed it was I? Would you have listened to what I had to say, or dismissed me as a raving lunatic?"

"I have always dismissed you as a raving lunatic James, I'm not about to stop now." Remus said as he rubbed his joints, raising an eyebrow as a small smirk crossed his face.

James returned the smirk and reached out a hand, which Remus accepted and hoisted himself to his feet, launching into a joyful embrace. The pair remained locked in a long overdue hug for several moments before either spoke.

"It's good to see you, my old friend." James said as he clapped Remus on the back.

"And you, Prongs. If only Sirius were still here-" Remus replied slightly downcast, "What of Harry? How is he?"

James frowned, "His Uncle nearly killed him, but Lily has done an amazing job. He's almost completely healed, except -"

"Except what?" Remus asked in alarm.

"Except – he's blind, Remus..."

"Blind?" Remus repeated in disbelief, "No..."

"It gets worse." James said grimly sliding to the dusty floor.
"Dumbledore's treachery runs far deeper than you know..."

"James-" Remus began slowly, "what has he done?..."

The last slither of the red sun was disappearing below the tree ridden horizon when a loud crack at last sounded in Harry's bedroom. Harry sat bolt upright in his bed in relief. Hermione had taken a very shaken Lily down the stairs to help her prepare the evening meal. She had become more and more panicky as the hours had ticked by, and Harry was not much help to her, as he was becoming increasingly worried himself. The Granger family were all sitting in the living room prodding the magical portraits and Harry had been left to rest for the time being. He was however, somewhat surprised to see not one, but two magical figures appear before him, both emanating strong glows.

"Father?" Harry said cautiously.

"Yes Harry- It's me." He said coming to Harry's side. "Sorry I'm so late, I ran into trouble."

"Is everything alright?" He asked in alarm eyeing the other figure.

"Everything is perfectly fine Harry," A familiar voice came to his ears as the second figure moved closer to him. "-although I resent being referred to as 'trouble'."

Harry raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Remus- Is that you?"

Chapter Sixteen: So Much To Say

Harry raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Remus- Is that you?"

"Yes Harry, it's me." Remus replied quietly, the full impact of what Harry being blind meant hitting him hard in the chest.

"Dad?" Harry inquired slowly.

"Yes Harry?" James replied.

"Why is he here?" Harry asked coldly.

"Harry-" James began.

"No James its fine." Remus interrupted him with a sigh, "I think I know what this is about."

"How could you accuse her, Remus? Come on, it's Hermione for Merlin's sake." Harry asked angrily.

"Harry- Dumbledore told us to interrogate her, he made a strong case against her, but after I saw her reaction to what we had done... well, let's just say that the majority of the order think Dumbledore is crazy to suspect her." Remus said apologetically.

"Yes well," Harry replied stiffly, "We've come to that conclusion as well, funnily enough. Don't you see what he's done Remus? Sirius is dead because of him, I'm blind because of him, my parents have thought me dead and vice versa for fourteen years because of him!"

"I know- James explained everything to me Harry. He didn't give me a chance not to listen, I assure you. By the way, what were you doing waltzing around Diagon Alley dressed as Harry anyway?" Remus asked James curiously.

"Nothing." Harry and James replied simultaneously, looking ever increasingly shifty.

Remus gave them both a sharp look. "Is that the 'unimportant' type of nothing, or the 'highly significant' type of nothing, then?"

"Neither." They blurted out again.

"Ah, the 'highly significant' nothing. Interesting." Remus said with a thoughtful nod.

"All will be explained Remus, but for now-

"Do you admit that you were wrong to accuse her?" Harry butted in.

"I admit it, and I humbly apologize." Remus said sincerely. "It appears that Dumbledore isn't what he seems. He has mislead us all for his own purposes, but as to what those purposes are, I cannot speculate."

"Neither can I. But I can tell you this much," Harry said hotly, "I'm starting to prefer Voldemort, at least he's only tried to kill me a couple of times. It's much more straight forward than this psychological, manipulative crap."

"I'd have to agree." Remus said with a frown, "It appears the line between the dark side and the light side just got significantly thinner."

"Yes well," James said darkly, "Even so, don't get any ideas about joining forces with Voldemort. If there's no one to fight for we will fight for ourselves."

"Join Voldemort?" Harry snorted, "You're kidding right?"

Just then a barrage of footsteps flew toward the bedroom door, which flung itself open to reveal Hermione and Lily, who charged into the room without taking a good look at its occupants. It was only when Lily looked up, eyes widened with shock and paled significantly, that Hermione noticed who she was staring at; the third member of the company. Hermione gasped in surprise, fearing the worst case scenario; Dumbledore had finally found them. She had torn into the room full ready to announce herself and Harry's engagement, only to be paralyzed with fear at the sight of Remus. However, her fears were suddenly quelled with Harry's soothing voice.

"It's ok, 'Mione." He said gently reaching out his hand towards her, "Remus is on our side now."

Hermione eyed the ex professor, still in apparent shock as she took Harry's hand and was tugged towards his bed gently. "He- he knows?" She asked hesitantly.

"About Dumbledore?" Harry inquired, "Yeah, he knows, and he's sorry he accused you, aren't you Remus?"

Remus received a dark stare before making his sincere apologies, which Hermione accepted gratefully. At least now the Werewolf knew the truth, he would be a powerful ally in the coming days. If only Ron were with them, Hermione felt sure everything would be alright. She was sure Ron could not think her a murderer, nor believe she was mixed up in Harry's disappearance, if only they could reach him. She decided she would approach Harry with the subject to see if something could be done once they were alone. However she momentarily lost her train of thought as Lily spoke. It wasn't until after Remus had finished apologizing that Lily managed to stutter her first words. She had remained staring at Remus for several minutes, mouth wide with shock.

"R- Remus? You look so-"

"Old?" Remus said with a small chuckle. "The wear and tear of being a werewolf is finally taking it's toll on me Lily. You on the other hand, look the same as you did the last day I saw you."

James snorted in offence. "You didn't tell me how wonderful I look."

Remus grinned. "You look truly hideous James, as always. Time has been cruel to you, you haven't changed in the slightest."

James looked at Remus indignantly before Harry interrupted. "Hey, watch it. Some of us are carrying his genes, if I'm doomed to look like that I'd rather not dwell on it."

James couldn't help but grin as Remus laughed, something about Harry reminded him dearly of Sirius; it was obvious his Godfather had rubbed off on him in more ways than one. Lily frowned at Harry but Hermione could see her eyes were laughing along with Remus and James.

"I take it you ran into each other in Diagon Alley?" Lily asked, casting a frown at James to let him know she thought him a blundering idiot.

"Well, he ran into Harry actually. I could hear Aurors coming, obviously the wizards in the alley had taken the bait and reported Harry's appearance to the ministry. I didn't have time to explain to him then and there so I bound him and took him to the shrieking shack and explained everything. I think he was a little shocked, to be honest." James said with a mischievous grin.

"A little shocked?" Remus repeated in despair.

"I can't believe you let dad bind you." Harry said with a small snicker.

"I thought he was you." Remus said defensively, "And the last thing I was expecting you to do was fire a body bind at me."

"Honestly Remus, I thought you were a Werewolf, can't you smell the difference?" James scoffed.

"Now? Yes." Remus said with a frown, "But your scents are almost indistinguishable. I mistakenly assumed it was Harry's even though it reminded me of you. If it had been anyone else posing as Harry I would have known immediately."

"Of course." James said undoubtedly with a large smirk.

Harry remained quiet as though lost in thought, and frowned deeply as Hermione squeezed his hand gently.

"Does Dumbledore have any idea what's going on?"

"None whatsoever. He seems determined to pin this whole thing on Hermione though, for reasons I cannot explain." Remus replied gravely.

"Because she's getting to close to me." Harry said darkly, "That's why."

Remus looked slightly perplexed at Harry's words, and James, seeing his look, decided to elaborate.

"Look at the facts Remus." James began in a hushed voice, "We find out about the Prophecy, Voldemort attacks. Dumbledore lies to us, tells us that Harry is dead, and sends us away from the Wizarding world. He knows of Sirius' innocence, yet he carts him off to Azkaban, and places Harry with Lily's sister and psychotic Muggle husband. Sirius escapes Azkaban thirteen years later only to have to remain on the run because Dumbledore still pretends to be oblivious. Sirius dies. Hermione starts to get close to Harry, and suddenly she's at the top of his hit list? That is not coincidence, Remus."

Remus sighed and stared absently at the wall for a moment, as if hardened by some memory. When he at last spoke, it was in a resigned voice, and he appeared pained and aged.

"I believe your theory has more merit than you believe, because I have a piece to add." He said quietly, taking a deep breath before he continued. "When I resigned from the position of Defense Against the Dark Arts Teacher, it was not my idea nor my desire. Dumbledore made the suggestion, and strongly advised me to keep a very low profile relationship with Harry. He said it would be best if I distanced myself."

"That makes sense now." Harry said darkly. "You were getting too close as well, the closest thing I had to a family, you and Sirius."

"My question is," Lily began slowly, "when Dumbledore realizes you are missing, what lengths will he go to get you back?"

"He will already know I'm missing, unfortunately." Remus said lowering himself to a sitting position on the end of Harry's bed. "I wasn't stationed in Diagon Alley alone."

"What?" James said in panic. "Who else was there?"

"Kingsley Shacklebolt and Nymphadora Tonks." Remus said with a sigh, "I took off when I saw you James, I told them to wait behind. They didn't know that I'd spotted you, so they obliged me. However I imagine once the Aurors from the Ministry arrived to check out the sightings of Harry Potter, they would have realized why I had run off. Then, with all the sightings of me running down the Alley after James, I imagine they realized I confronted you. They possibly believe that I

have been kidnapped by an impostor, or worse, a Death Eater in disguise. Dumbledore would have forced this information from them."

"Do they still think that I sold Harry out?" Hermione asked.

"No, they think you're innocent, just as I do. We just can't figure out Dumbledore's vendetta against you. Hermione, he will conclude from my disappearance that you have kidnapped me as well." Remus said quietly.

Daily Prophet; 28th July, 1996

FUDGE WITHDRAWS AURORS FROM POTTER CASE

In a shock move today, Minister of Magic; Cornelius Fudge withdrew all Aurors from the case of missing boy Harry Potter. The move comes just three days after the Minister allocated a team of 20 Aurors to assist in the search for missing Fugitive Hermione Granger, wanted in connection with Potter's disappearance. Albus Dumbledore made the request for assistance from the ministry after his own resources were reportedly stretched on the vastness of the investigation. So far, Fudge has yet to explain his actions to the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, who has been tirelessly searching for any trace of the Boy Who Lived since he disappeared on the 16th of July following a major disturbance at his muggle residence.

Dumbledore himself was seen leaving Fudge's office at the Ministry late this morning looking very frazzled. He would not comment on the situation except to say that he was extremely disappointed in Fudge's inability to take Harry's disappearance seriously. However, Dumbledore is not the only one angered by the minister's decision. The unexplained withdrawal of the Aurors from the search has deeply angered the general public who are calling for Fudge's head.

"Potter gave this world nearly 14 years of peace, I think we owe it to the boy to do all that we can to find him and bring him home safely." One of the hundreds of protesting Wizards stationed in the foyer of the Ministry of Magic stated early this morning.

However, it was apparent that anyone seeking answers for the bizarre behavior of the minister would be unsatisfied, as Fudge remains locked away in his office, unavailable for comment. It looks as though Dumbledore and his loyal band of followers are the only ones who young Potter can count on to find him now.

Daily Prophet; 29th of July, 1996

HUNT FOR FUGITIVE IN POTTER CASE QUASHED BY FUDGE

More shocking news from the Ministry of Magic today, when Cornelius Fudge ordered Professor Albus Dumbledore and all his followers to abandon their hunt for missing fugitive Hermione Granger in connection with the Potter case. The announcement follows yesterdays unexplained announcement that Fudge had recalled all Aurors from the search for young Harry Potter, who has been missing for thirteen days. Granger, sixteen, was the first on the scene at Potter's family home when the incident occurred, making her a major suspect. Granger disappeared with her parents, Jonathan and Julia, shortly after being put under 24 hour house surveillance.

An enraged Albus Dumbledore was seen storming into the Ministry building in the early hours of this morning, only to be seen leaving just as furiously shortly afterwards. Moments later Minister Cornelius Fudge surprised the media and this reporter by making an appearance in the Ministry lobby to make a formal statement. He appeared grave faced and slightly sleep deprived as he came before us to explain his actions to the public.

"As you know I have withdrawn my Aurors from the Potter case. Today I have forbidden any manhunts for Hermione Granger and her immediate family. Hermione Granger is in no way involved with the disappearance of Harry Potter, and anyone who tries to take justice into their own hands will be severely punished. Hermione Granger is one of Harry Potter's best friends, can anyone see the absurdity of trying to pin his disappearance on her?"

While Fudge does his best to sound convincing in his convictions, the Wizarding world isn't buying it. Many high ranking wizards are

questioning the Ministers' ability to make important decisions for our country as a whole, and are suggesting that perhaps the strain of the job has become too much for him to handle. The Wizarding world at large are calling for a snap election to remove Fudge from office and replace him with someone who won't fail to see what needs to be done. It seems as though after this series of unorthodox decisions, Fudge is in very real danger of loosing his job.

"Alright, you can pretend all you like that you had nothing to do with this," Remus said casually flopping the front pages of the last two Daily Prophets' on the table in front of James, "but I know you far too well, James Potter. You're blackmailing him, aren't you?"

"Maybe a little." James said with an unconcerned shrug. "It was Harry's idea."

The morning sun was rising steadily and the warm rays penetrated the kitchen and fell across the dining room table where James sat drinking a mug of pumpkin juice and eating a plate full of bacon and eggs that Lily was now duplicating for Remus. The werewolf raised an eyebrow and studied the stag momentarily before commenting on the statement. He appeared a little taken a back by James' bluntness.

"Harry told you to blackmail the Minister of Magic, and you just went ahead and did it?" Remus asked incredulously.

James nodded casually as he took a swig of pumpkin juice. "That's why I was in Diagon Alley. Had to ask Griphook to take care of a few things for me."

"Your bank manager is helping you blackmail Cornelius Fudge?" Remus asked, jaw dropping heavily.

"Of course," James said as if this were a stupid question, "What's he got to be allegiant to Fudge for? The man has denied the Goblins their rights for his entire term."

Lily pushed the gob smacked Remus down into an empty chair as she shoved a large plate of bacon, eggs and toast in front of him.

Remus stared amazed at James to his left, who was shoveling eggs into his mouth as though he had to protect his food. "Why are we blackmailing Fudge again? To piss off Dumbledore?"

"No." James said in an exasperated voice, "To keep Dumbledore from getting too close, and to keep him away from Hermione."

"You fear for her life, don't you?" Remus said grimly.

"Dumbledore has proved he is capable of anything, Remus." James said shortly. "And I won't take any risks, not now she is carrying my grandchild."

Remus gagged. "You what?" he wheezed.

James sighed. "Hermione is pregnant, Remus. That's why she was at Privet Drive that night, to tell Harry he was going to be a father. Only when she got there, he was gone.."

Remus suddenly had a dawning look of comprehension as his fork hovered halfway between his plate and his mouth. "That explains a lot."

James nodded darkly. "So you see, she's even more at risk now than she ever has been. We must keep the pregnancy a secret at all costs."

Remus nodded, chewing his bacon carefully and thoughtfully, as Jonathan and Julia emerged into the kitchen, still looking slightly bewildered. Lily conjured up another two plates and ushered them into seats at the table, forcing them to begin their breakfast. James and Remus greeted them both as they finished off their meals and leaned back sighing in satisfaction. James looked inquiringly at Lily, who did not appear as if she was going to sit down and eat. James noticed that she looked as though her thoughts were elsewhere, and it only took him a few seconds to guess where they were.

"Sit down and have some breakfast, Lil. You can't cook for everyone and not eat yourself." James insisted.

Lily gave him a small smile but shook her head. "I've got to get back to work."

"Lily," James said with a sigh, "You've barely emerged from your office for the past two days, three from what Harry has said. You need to take a break."

"I'll take a break when they're complete." Lily replied stiffly, "I need to get them finished."

"Harry won't be disappointed with you if you don't get them done in time, Lily." Julia said softly with a small smile.

"He won't have a reason to pretend he's not disappointed if I get them done, will he?" She replied determinedly.

James sighed admitting defeat.

"See you at Dinner then?" He asked hopefully.

"See you at dinner." She confirmed with a smile as she kissed James on the cheek before departing through the door.

Jonathan took a drink of pumpkin juice, which now, after a few days, he decided wasn't so whacky after all. He looked at James and grinned. "Your wife is a very determined workaholic."

James groaned. "Tell me about it. She'd never admit it, she thinks she's perfectly within the boundaries of a normal working person."

"Hermione is a lot like that." Julia smiled. "Always very determined to do her best."

"Speaking of Hermione, we should round the kids up for breakfast, if we can get up this early they can damn well do it too." Jonathan said as he got to his feet, wiping his mouth on a napkin.

"I'll go, John." James said getting to his feet.

"No no it's fine." Jonathan said firmly, "I need to have a little talk with Harry anyway."

"Got your bamboo spikes and hot pokers at the ready?" Remus muttered under his breath.

James snorted into his pumpkin juice. "I hope not, we're past the blaming stage aren't we?."

Jonathan grinned as he moved toward the kitchen door. "Oh yes, we're well past that stage. We just need to have a little chat about the future."

As Jonathan left Remus' eyes skimmed over the Prophets once again. "Well, at least we can deduce one thing from these articles." he said finally.

"What's that?" James asked nicking a piece of bacon from the Werewolf's plate and popping it into his mouth with a finders keepers look on his face.

"That Dumbledore has hushed up my disappearance." Remus said frowning at his bacon less plate.

"But why would he do that?" James asked.

"Perhaps he doesn't want the public to know his Aurors were at the scene when Harry appeared and still failed to bring him in. Perhaps he needs to get his Aurors to co-operate with his story, and they are reluctant to do so. Or perhaps my disappearance is a convenience, just an event that he didn't have to arrange for himself to take place. He will have his reasons, we will just have to wait and see if he decides to go public." Remus said thoughtfully, folding the paper up before him.

Harry stared blankly into the darkness within him. Just as Myrddin had shown him, he began to seek out the magical streams that had fragmented through his body when his core had been destroyed. As he searched, he began to whiz past scattered streams. The streams seemed to blur together the way street lights do while speeding past in a car in the dark of night. As he delved deeper and deeper towards the source of the streams they grew thicker and increased in density, until at last he found the shattered core.

As it had done in Myrddin's presence, Harry's magic flickered and shot out sparks like a broken light bulb, but it was somehow stronger than it had been before. Harry guessed that this was because he was physically healed and much stronger than he had been the first time he had delved into his core. Once again he resumed focusing on merging the broken streams of magic, picturing them in his mind in four large streams, flowing calmly throughout his body. He forced himself with pure determination to push the broken streaks of light together, and ever so slowly, they began to obey his thoughts.

One by one the little flecks of light attached themselves to what were becoming four great rivers of magic within him. Harry could not help but feel euphoric as the magic continued to obey him and he all at once felt more powerful than he could remember feeling in a very long time. But as soon as that feeling had come, it disappeared. Harry heard the door to his room open and close and a series of footsteps come towards him, he immediately lost concentration and the streams split open again, the tiny bursts of light falling away to resume their prior positions. Harry cursed under his breath. He decided that his concentration would be his downfall.

"Harry?" Jonathan's tentative voice came.

"Mr. Granger?" Harry inquired regaining his composure.

Jonathan shuddered slightly. "I don't know how you do that but I wish you wouldn't. It's slightly disturbing, too disturbing for someone my age." he said with a light grin.

Harry smirked. "I'm sorry sir, I keep forgetting you're not used to magic and the strange occurrences that come along with it."

"Quite alright." Jonathan said settling himself into a chair beside Harry's bed. "I was hoping we could have a little talk?"

"Of course Sir." Harry said sitting up straight, preparing himself for the verbal assault he had been waiting for since the moment he knew Hermione's father was in the house.

"You look scared." Jonathan observed. "You needn't be, Harry."

"You're not mad that I got your daughter pregnant?" Harry asked incredulously.

"I was furious. I was ready to tear your head off, too be honest." Jonathan contradicted him, pausing for dramatic effect, "You are both far too young for this much responsibility, and I am disappointed that you both could not exercise a little self control."

"I'm sor-"

"But- that was before I saw how my daughter reacted when we found your room."

Harry remained silent, imagining how Hermione must have felt at the sight of his empty room, destroyed, covered in blood- the terrible smell.

"She must have been horrified." Harry said quietly.

"I've never seen my daughter so distraught." Jonathan said quietly as he remembered the seven days where his daughter had barely eaten or slept. "She truly loves you Harry, and from what I've seen, you love her, but I still feel as though I am obliged to ask where you see this relationship going. My daughter is very fragile right now, the last thing she needs is to be abandoned by the boy she loves, and neither does her child."

"I understand," Harry said nodding thoughtfully, "and I was actually rather hoping you would ask, because there is something I need to ask you Mr. Granger."

"Yes?" Jonathan asked, slightly surprised.

"I love Hermione, and I believe as you say she loves me. We have a child on the way, and things are going to change drastically. This is the worst possible time that we could have brought a child into the world, a war is about to begin and I will be at the center of it. This is why I want Hermione as close to me as possible, I want to protect her and my child with everything in me, and I want her to know I love her no matter what happens. I'm asking you for Hermione's hand in marriage, Sir, if you will grant it. I know I'm asking a lot, but I promise

you, I will live through this war for her; I will live through this war for your daughter and my son."

Jonathan leaned back in his chair slightly speechless at this proclamation. In Mr. Granger's terms, this was a lot of important information to take in a very limited space of time. His mind began processing the boy's words silently, and Harry mistook his silence for reluctance to answer.

"If you're worried I'm only marrying her for the baby then you needn't. I would marry your daughter a thousand times over for no reason at all other than the fact that she completes me." Harry said quickly, hoping he would not be refused the one true happiness he had found in his life.

Harry heard shuffling noises and realized that Mr. Granger had risen from his chair and walked over to the side of his bed and was now standing within inches of him. Harry suddenly grew fearful that the man would not allow him to marry his daughter, as he stood hovering over him in complete silence. Just as Harry was about to speak he felt Hermione's father reach across and take his hand, shaking it firmly.

"I would be proud to have you as a son in law, Harry." Jonathan said in a gruff voice.

"So- You're saying yes?" Harry asked almost in disbelief.

Jonathan grinned. "Yes Harry, you can marry my daughter. You better look after her though, or I'll be forced to re-break your legs."

"I understand sir." Harry said with a wide grin, taken by surprise when the large man reached down and gave him a bracing hug.

"I wanted her to give up the baby, you know." Jonathan said quietly as he stood up straight.

"You did?" Harry said trying not to sound shocked.

"I was convinced that you would not support her and that you did not love each other." He said with a sigh, his voice grew more distant as

if he had turned his back on Harry. "It would not have been fair on the baby to be raised in such turmoil. I was also convinced that the pair of you, if you did stick together, would be incompetent parents. You are only Sixteen after all, can you blame me?"

"We had not met before but for a few seconds, I can see how you would misjudge my character, especially after all that has happened." Harry replied quietly.

"Well Harry, I know better now, and I thank you for your understanding. I love my daughter, I would do anything for her happiness. Protecting her is the only way I know how to show her that I care." Jonathan said sadly.

"I understand that Sir. I love her too." Harry said quietly.

Jonathan nodded to himself resolutely, he had accomplished what he had set out to do.

"Breakfast's ready." he said as he began walking to the door, "Hurry up or it'll get cold."

"Yes Sir." Harry said as he threw the covers back off his bed.

"And Harry?" Jonathan called as he stopped and turned in the doorway.

"Yes Sir?"

"Thank you."

"For what?" Harry asked quizzically.

"Just thank you," Jonathan replied gruffly. "and for the love of God call me Jonathan."

Harry laughed as the man departed out of the door. "Alright."

Moments after Harry had managed to dress himself another figure walked into the room, although this time the figure had a deep golden glow. Harry smiled as Hermione made his way towards him.

"Um, did my father just leave this room or am I going crazy?" Hermione asked slightly perplexed.

"You're not crazy, he was just here, we had a little talk." Harry said with a bemused smirk.

"Oh my god, are you alright? He didn't threaten to castrate you did he?" Hermione panicked.

Harry laughed, "Of course not. I just asked him if it would be alright if I married you. He seemed quite pleased."

"You what?" Hermione gaped in surprise.

"Asked him if you could be my wife, you know, like we planned?" Harry asked as if she were being strange.

"And you're still alive?" She asked incredulously.

Harry laughed again, not sure whether he should be scared or not.
"Um, as far as I know?"

"He said yes?" she asked hopefully.

"Yes Hermione, he said yes." Harry said with a slightly amused tone.

"So – We can tell everyone now?" She asked again.

"Alright alright." He said laughing loudly as she leapt forward and hugged him. "We can tell everyone, but you need to help me downstairs first, I'm starving."

Lily yelled in frustration as she flopped down in her office chair, glaring at the contacts that sat on her desk. Things had been going perfectly; perfectly until it had come time to place the appearance charms on them. The appearance charms made the contacts look like Harry's normal eyes, so much so that it was impossible to tell that they were contacts. However, It appeared, that after numerous tests, that the appearance charms interfered with the vision charms to the extent that the contacts were useless while they looked like an actual

eye. Frustratingly, as soon as the appearance charms were removed, the vision charms returned to full power.

Lily Potter was extremely pissed off. Without the appearance charms, the contacts were perfect in the sense that Harry would have his full vision, as well as 360 degree vision, x-ray vision, infer-red vision, night vision and many other features. However, without the appearance charms, Harry's eyes would have no definition, they would appear as a solid, glowing, metallic silver. Lily ran her hands through her hair in annoyance. The whole point of creating the contacts was for Harry's eyes to look unmistakably normal, and now -. As it stood, there were two whole days until Harry's sixteenth birthday, and Lily had hoped to have the contacts ready so that he could wear them from that day forward. She stood up determinedly. She would work night and day to get these contacts completed for her son's birthday. She would not let him down again; not now that they had all been given a second chance at life as a family...

Chapter Seventeen: The Blackmailing Of Cornelius Fudge

Daily Prophet; 30th of July, 1996

FUDGE PUTS FOOT DOWN OVER POTTER/LUPIN DISAPPEARANCE

In a fiery retort to Albus Dumbledore's claim that Hermione Granger kidnapped long-standing Order of the Phoenix member Remus Lupin after masquerading as Harry Potter in Diagon Alley three days ago, Cornelius Fudge has dismissed the charge as ludicrous. 'Dumbledore has finally lost his marbles, if anyone could believe a sixteen year old girl under the sway of Polyjuice Potion had the capabilities to capture a powerful wizard in broad daylight they are slightly deranged. Hermione Granger did not kidnap Remus Lupin or Harry Potter.'

Questions were raised over whether Lupin's disappearance was connected to that of Harry Potter after reports flooded in that Lupin chased Potter down a side alley three days ago and subsequently disappeared. Lupin, the only remaining adult that lives from James Potter's tight knit group of friends from school, became close with Harry after a one year stint as a Defense Against the Dark Arts Teacher at Hogwarts two years ago. When questioned about Dumbledore's theory, other members of the Order of the Phoenix refused to comment on the likelihood of Hermione Granger's involvement.

Daily Prophet; 31st of July, 1996

'BOY WHO LIVED ALIVE AND WELL ON SIXTEENTH BIRTHDAY' SAYS FUDGE

In a shock announcement late yesterday afternoon, Minister Cornelius Fudge stated that he had been in contact with Harry Potter and that the boy was indeed alive and well. The announcement came after growing fears that the boy would not live to see his sixteenth birthday, which falls today. Fudge commented further that he did not know where Harry was currently staying, but that he was in good hands, and enjoying his time away from the spotlight.

Cornelius sighed wearily as he laid the front page of the Prophet out on his desk, rubbing his temples soothingly. Lying to the Prophet was something he was attuned to doing by now, something he did with relative ease, yet this time was different. Telling the world that the Boy Who Lived was alive and well when he did not know or believe it was something that ate at his conscience. The only reason he had to believe that this was the truth was the word of a mysterious stranger who had made himself known several nights ago. A mysterious stranger who threatened his entire career if he did not obey his commands. A cloaked man who had made it his business to blackmail the minister.

It had all begun late one night four days ago when Cornelius had been sitting in his office by the fireplace, stretched out in his armchair. He had had a fiercely busy day fielding questions from the press and general public and refusing to answer them. He was exhausted, and deeply troubled. Everyone was hyped up over the Potter disappearance and the girl Dumbledore insisted had taken him. Even worse, everyone was pointing the finger at him and wondering why he hadn't done more to personally find the boy himself. Well, he had just authorized the use of 20 Aurors to assist Dumbledore in his inquiries, and he was hoping that would get the public off his back. Just when he thought things were finally going according to plan, the fire roared up and an unusual colored owl shot out of the flames.

It came so swiftly that Cornelius ducked in alarm as it swooped over his head and landed on his desk. When he finally chanced a weary glance up he saw the bird stick out its leg towards him with an impatient thrust. With trembling hands, Cornelius removed the scroll from the bird's leg, which took off so quickly it spooked him again. After several moments he unrolled the parchment to read the following message which made his blood run cold;

'Meet me in room number 13 of the Leaky Cauldron at Midnight tonight, or I will disclose some very interesting information to the Daily Prophet pertaining to you stealing money from the Ministry and accepting bribes. Come alone. Do not alert the authorities or you will be exposed.'

Now Cornelius was a career man and being so, took this threat even more seriously than he would take a threat on his life. He did not know who had sent him the owl, or how they had obtained this knowledge of his doings, but he did have the sense to realize he needed to take this seriously. Thus he stole away in the middle of the night to the leaky cauldron, leaving his wife snoring loudly in the dark, undisturbed. The air had been crisp that night, it bit at his face viciously as he stood outside the Leaky Cauldron, deciding whether he dare enter or not. At last his thirst for the power he had, the power that he wanted to keep, got the better of him, and he pushed the creaky door open to find the Cauldron almost deserted.

Tom had looked up from his endless glass cleaning to nod at the minister with a knowing grin. Truth be told, this had not been the first late night visit to the Cauldron that his wife did not know about, the only difference this time, was that he was meeting someone who threatened his career, not someone who threatened his marriage. Suddenly he found himself wondering whether his blackmailer also knew intimate details about his "night wanderings" as well. He returned the smile weakly and turned to make his way up the staircase to the many rooms the Cauldron held.

Cornelius stood outside of room number 13 for a very long time, merely wondering whether his career meant so much to him that he would meet the demands of the blackmailer.

"Are you going to stand out there all night, Minister? Or are we going to have our little chat?" A disembodied voice called through the door.

Cornelius paled, gulped, then placed a pudgy, shaky hand on the brass door knob and turned ever so slowly. He let the door fall open and remained on the threshold. A man sat in front of the fireplace in a large armchair, his back to the doorway so that he could only see the top of the man's hood. The man appeared dangerously calm; something which only made Cornelius more fearful as he scarcely dared breath. The orange glow from the fire bounced the blackmailers shadow across every wall in the room. Cornelius whimpered quietly.

"Don't be shy, Cornelius." The man spoke again with a hint of enjoyment in his voice, "We have much to talk about. Come in, come in."

Cornelius cleared his throat, puffing himself up importantly as he stepped bravely across the threshold, closing the door behind him. "Now see here. If you think you can manipulate me into -"

"Manipulate you into what, Cornelius?" the man asked curiously. "I don't need to manipulate you. With the evidence I have stacked up against you, you will be going out of your way to meet my needs, just to keep your job."

Fudge huffed in disbelief several times before replying stubbornly, "So you say!"

The man chuckled to himself quietly. "Ah yes, where to begin? Should I start with your business affairs, or your extra marital affairs? How about business? Ah yes, the money you shifted around from the Orphaned Witches and Wizards fund for your own personal use?"

The minister gulped and paled significantly. "What do you want?"

"Simple really." The man replied leaning back in his chair. "I want you to remove your support from Dumbledore's crusade against Hermione Granger. Then, I want you to stop looking for Harry Potter."

"Preposterous!" Fudge cried in outrage. "What have you done with the boy?"

"The 'boy', is fine. He doesn't want to be found at present, and really, this idea that Hermione Granger had the gall to kidnap and kill him is ridiculous. Come now Minister, you don't truly believe that a 16 year old girl could commit such a heinous crime, do you?" the man asked silkily.

"Dumbledore says-" Fudge began in protest.

"Dumbledore this, and Dumbledore that." the man replied in a bored tone. "Tell me, Cornelius, do you ever think for yourself? Or does Dumbledore do all your thinking for you? If that is the case, the

wizarding world is in a whole lot of trouble. You think I have dirt on you, Fudge, you're a saint compared to good old Dumbledore."

"Who are you?" Cornelius stammered shakily.

"Me?" the man confirmed with a hollow laugh. "I'm nothing more than a ghost."

"Where is Harry Potter? If you've hurt him I'll - I'll -"

"-Stutter me to death?" The man asked coolly. "Really Cornelius, you aren't very intimidating. But you needn't worry. Harry is not hurt, he is quite happy I assure you, you will see him again soon enough. The last thing I would ever do is hurt Harry Potter."

"If you're working for Voldemort -"

"Voldemort?" The man laughed. "I want Voldemort destroyed just as much as you do. Harry is safe, I give you my word."

"The word of a ghost?" Fudge asked skeptically.

"The word of a ghost." The man repeated with a sly grin.

Cornelius let out a troubled sigh of defeat. "What do you need me to do?"

"You can start by publicly revoking any statements you've made about Hermione Granger's guilt. Publicly remove all Aurors from the Potter case and shun Dumbledore's crusade against Hermione. Tell the wizarding world that Harry is alive and well, that he is enjoying his time out of the spot light. He will show himself when he is ready. You must withdraw all support of Dumbledore's actions, and inform him he must stop looking for Harry. You cannot tell him why." The man replied as he stretched his hands out to the fire, back still turned to the minister.

"Anything else?" Fudge asked testily.

"I will be visiting you often, Cornelius, I think that will be enough for you to get started on." the man answered cheerfully.

"And what if Dumbledore doesn't obey my orders?" Fudge asked fearfully.

"Make sure he does, or your wife might accidentally run into Bertha. You remember Bertha don't you, Cornelius? Tall, leggy thing, with enormously large -"

"Alright, alright!" Fudge said shakily. "I'll try."

"Succeed, Cornelius, there is no room for failure."

"What if he doesn't believe me? What if he's suspicious?" Fudge asked, panicking.

"Avoid meeting with him in person as much as possible. Do not crack under the pressure. There is a lot riding on this Minister; your career, your family..."

"How do you sleep at night?" Fudge spat angrily.

"Much better than I used too." The blackmailer replied honestly. "You see, Dumbledore stole something from me, long ago, and now it has returned to me, by an uncanny twist of fate."

"You speak of Dumbledore as if he were the Dark Lord himself." Fudge noted.

"If you were aware of half the things Albus Dumbledore has done, you would also." the man replied. "I will contact you again in three days time. Take care of everything I have asked you too, I will have more for you to do when we meet again. Don't disappoint me Cornelius."

"R-right." Fudge replied as strongly as he could. "But -"

Before Cornelius could get out his question there was a loud crack, and all at once he was the only one left in the room. Feeling slightly faint, Cornelius walked around to the fireplace and looked at the vacant chair where the blackmailer had been sitting. He dumped himself down in it unceremoniously and put his head in his hands. This was becoming all too much for him to bare. The public would

hate him for abandoning the Potter hunt, but if he didn't - well, it didn't bare thinking about. It was in that moment that Fudge resolved himself to do what he had to do to keep his job, and his dignity. He would allow himself to become a puppet to a faceless puppeteer.

Harry and Hermione's announcement came as little surprise to most of the residents of the Potter mansion, except for maybe Remus and Anna. Anna, because she was determined to believe that Hermione would die a spinster that left her fortune to her library, and Remus, because he had only just become aware of the fact that they were in love, and having a child together. Despite this the previous night had been spent celebrating into the early hours of the morning.

It was Hermione who rose first the next morning; Harry's birthday, and headed down to the kitchen. As she hit the bottom of the staircase she noticed that the door to Lily's office was slightly ajar and a strip of light shone from within. Curious, she moved her way into the office and down the staircase, only to find that Lily had not slept at all. In fact she was so absorbed in her work that she did not even hear Hermione come up behind her and peer over her shoulder.

"How're they coming?" She asked, making Lily jump.

"Hermione! You scared me, I didn't hear you." Lily exclaimed as she turned to face her, "Not very good, I'm afraid."

"I'm sorry Mrs. Potter; I didn't mean to startle you. What's wrong with them?" She asked coming in to take a closer look.

"The appearance charms are overriding the vision charms. No matter what I do I can't seem to make them work. I've tried removing some of the extra features I cast on them, but that doesn't work either. I've tried putting weaker appearance charms on but it still overrides. I don't know what to do, he'll be awake soon and I-"

"Mrs. Potter?" Hermione said quietly. "Harry isn't going to care about how they appear. What you've done is a miracle; he'll be able to see again, something that he thought he might never do again. You've given him his sight back, Mrs. Potter, that's far more important than what they look like."

Lily sighed quietly. "I guess you're right. I just really wanted these to be perfect. He's my son—"

"You have nothing to make up for, Mrs. Potter. What happened to you, James and Harry was not your fault. Only one person can accept responsibility for that, Harry doesn't blame you or James." Hermione said softly.

"Thank you, Hermione." Lily said with a small smile. "I guess I hope he likes silver."

"He will." She said with a warm smile. "I was going to make him breakfast while he's still sleeping, want to help me out?"

"Sure." Lily smiled. "That's a nice idea."

"That's why I need your help. I want it to be special, and I'm not so good with presentation. It'll be the first meal he's seen in a long time, thanks to you." Hermione grinned.

Lily laughed. "Well I didn't think about it like that. I suppose it will be the first time he's seen me and James that he can remember, as well." she added with a frown. "I better do something with my hair."

Hermione laughed quietly as they reached the kitchen. "You're his mother there's no need for you to be nervous."

"Yes there is, I want my son's first impression of me to be a good one." Lily said perfectly seriously as she pulled out a large pan.

Hermione smiled removing the eggs and bacon from the fridge. "I can help you if you like."

"Thank you Hermione." Lily said with a small smile as she pulled out her wand to bewitch the pots.

Meanwhile, somewhere far above their heads, Remus' nose began switching at the wafting smell of cooking bacon that was floating up the stairs. His eyelids flew open swiftly as he rolled out of bed, feet landing soundlessly on the floor. He moved to the left wall of his room,

scrunched up his knuckles and began knocking a series of rhythms on its surface. He finished his first round of knocking and waited, listening carefully, but after nothing returned but silence, he repeated the knocking.

On the other side of the wall James woke up groggily to a thumping noise on his wall. It took him several minutes to get his bearings, and then he listened carefully to the knocks. With a sudden realization he laughed out loud and crawled over to the wall, and began to knock a complicated pattern back. Upon completing his code he sat back and waited, listening carefully. There was a dramatic pause before a rush of knocks came quickly, causing James to smirk. His smirk soon turned to a look of shock, however, when his bedroom door flew open and he saw Harry standing there.

"You know, I can smell the bacon too, and while I agree that stealing the whole pan and devouring it before anyone else could get a look in would be worth the lengthy beatings my mother would deal out, would you mind keeping your knocks down? Some of us have had their magical cores ripped out and are trying to focus our magic. I find the incessant tapping very distracting." He said calmly.

"How in the name of Merlin did you figure out our code?" James asked incredulously as Remus came up behind Harry looking disheveled. "We've been using that code since our Hogwarts days."

Harry sighed in a bored manner. "It's one step away from Morse code dad; it wasn't that hard to figure out."

"What the hell is Morse code?" James asked, slightly perplexed. "Happy Birthday by the way."

Harry would have rolled his eyes. "It's a muggle thing, and thanks."

"Happy Birthday, Harry." Remus said with a grin.

"Thanks Mooney." Harry replied with a grin.

"How is your magic coming?" James inquired cautiously.

"Fairly well. I still need to exercise more control, but I am finding it much easier to maintain my concentration." Harry replied. "I'm getting better every day."

"That's great son." James answered with a grin as he got up and patted him on the shoulder. "You'll be ready in no time."

"I hope so," Harry replied quietly with a frown, "We can't hide out here forever."

James nodded in agreement as Remus' stomach growled.

"Can we go eat now? Please?" Remus begged desperately, giving James his world renowned puppy dog eyes, making him laugh.

"Hungry Harry?" he asked.

"Starving. Show me the way." Harry replied eagerly.

James and Remus lead Harry slowly down the staircase, guiding him around the corner and through the kitchen door, only to be met by shrieks. James, Remus and Harry all startled and yelled in unison; "What?"

"You're supposed to be still sleeping, that's what!" Lily said in exasperation.

"Pinch me Remus." James said in disbelief.

"Don't have to ask me twice." Remus said with a grin as he pinched him as hard as he could on the upper arm.

"Ow! A-ha! So it isn't a dream. She just told me I should still be in bed, right?"

"That she did." Harry replied with a raised eyebrow.

"So why is it that every other morning it's; 'get out of bed you lazy twat?' He asked Lily defiantly.

"Because you'd never get out otherwise!" Lily retorted.

"Oh," James said with an affronted sniff. "I see how it is..."

"Happy Birthday Sweetheart." Lily said with a warm smile, scowling at James swiftly as she edged him out of the way to hug her son.

"Thanks Mum." Harry said in an embarrassed voice.

"We were going to give you breakfast in bed, but it looks like we weren't quick enough." She said apologetically.

"That's ok Mum, it smells delicious." Harry said honestly, his stomach growling maniacally.

"That's Hermione's doing, not mine." Lily said with a glance to Hermione who was standing behind her.

Lily moved out of the way so that Hermione could come forward and hug him. She kissed him softly as they embraced and whispered him a happy birthday, which made his skin flush pink as he was aware of his parents watching them.

"It smells great Hermione, thanks." Harry said softly.

"It's nothing special." She said modestly. "But before we eat your Mum has a present for you."

"Oh Mum you didn't have to-" Harry began to protest.

"-I wanted too." She said stiffly handing him a small wooden box. "You've missed out on far too many birthday presents already, you won't miss anymore."

Harry nodded with a small smile, as he felt the smooth edges of the box under his fingers. "What is it?"

"You'll see." She said gently. "I may have to put them in for you -"

"Alright?" Harry said uneasily.

Lily laughed. "It won't hurt, come here." She said as she pulled him under the light, taking the box from his hands and opening it.

Harry heard the snap of the box being opened, then felt his mother's fingers gently pry open his left eyelid. He flinched awkwardly and Lily released him quickly.

"I'm sorry did that hurt?"

"No -" Harry replied, "I just wasn't expecting it, that's all. Mum did you-"

"Well here, hold still for me, ok?" She cut him off with her reply as she pried his eyelid apart once more.

"Ok." He mumbled softly, trying not to move.

An odd cooling sensation came over his left eye as Lily slotted something in over his damaged eyeball. It felt almost liquid, and it spread itself out over the entire eye he could feel the coolness spread, almost trickle down the nerves that attached the eye to his brain as though it were repairing them. It wasn't a painful feeling, more pleasant, and calming. As Lily released his eyelids she put Harry's own hand over his left eye and told him to hold it shut. He obeyed as she moved to his right eye. Again the cooling sensation flooded over his eye and traveled through his nerves and muscles. Harry decided it was the oddest feeling he had ever experienced. After a few minutes the strange sensation subsided, and Lily told him to take his hands away and open his eyes.

Harry removed his hands almost reluctantly from his eyes, fearing that nothing would happen. His hands fell to his sides weightlessly, but his eyes remained closed, all his hope, all his prayers were about to come to a climax. He could hear the others all telling him to open his eyes. Their voices all seemed distant, almost like echoes from another world. He squeezed his eyes shut tightly, and with one final burst of hope, he flung them open...

The colors were blinding. And he brought his hands up to shield his eyes he concluded that being released from his cell of darkness was a lot harder than being banished too it. His eyes burned and watered madly as he tried to focus on his surroundings, slowly lowering his hands cautiously. The first thing he saw was Hermione. Her image came swimming into view like a beautiful dream that he never wanted

to fade away. She was even more beautiful than he remembered her being the last time he saw her.

Next to Hermione he saw Remus standing there, looking as ragged and drawn as ever, but smiling and ecstatically happy none the less. His eyes moved across to James. His father, who look just exactly like he did in the photo album he had locked away in his trunk. He had aged, most definitely, he looked exhausted, probably from worrying about him, but he was the most pleasant sight Harry had ever seen. For years he had dreamed of walking into a room one day and finding his mother and father standing in front of him, as real as himself, and now, at last, it was true. He could see that tears were stinging his father's eyes as he flicked across once more to see his mother.

Lily was still as beautiful as she was in the pictures of her wedding day, she tearful smile made Harry well up inside with warmth. He searched her face, and there they were - her emerald green eyes, something she had passed down to Harry. Looking at her now he could see why everyone had always commented on them, they were her eyes to a tee. As he watched her he noticed she looked upset.

"What is it mum?" he asked in concern.

"There's a few things you need to know Harry-

"Like what?" He asked, unable to stop taking her in. "They feel perfect, I can see even better than I could before, and I don't have to wear my glasses."

"Oh Harry!" She said rushing forward and engulfing him in a tight hug, her eyes welling with tears.

Harry laughed hugging her back. "It's ok mum, don't cry."

"But Harry," She said quietly. "They aren't exactly what I'd hoped they would be."

"What do you mean?" he inquired, "I can see, Mum, that's all that matters."

"Yes but, the appearance charms didn't work." She replied with a sigh.

"So they don't look like my eyes did?" Harry asked, trying to understand what she was upset about.

"No," She replied shaking her head. "I'm sorry Harry; the only way they would work was if they were left in their original state. They're solid silver, Harry."

Harry walked over to the full length mirror that stood in the living room and gazed at his reflection. His eyes were indeed now completely metallic silver. It looked odd at first, like a shiny plate where his iris should be, but as he looked closer, he realized that they didn't look half bad at all. The silver suited his complexion well, and he liked the way his hair partially covered them in soft wisps. In fact, he decided that they gave him an intimidating look, an edge even. Harry could not help but smile when he pictured Dumbledore's look of fear upon staring into Harry's new eyes for the first time.

"They're perfect, Mum." He said softly, giving her a warm smile as he walked back to hug her, glad to feel that she was relieved. "I love them."

"I'm so glad." Lily said quietly.

"Personally I think they look cool." Remus said voicing his opinion. "Just don't touch me with them ok?"

Harry grinned. "Would I do such a thing?"

Remus snorted. "You talked your father into blackmailing the Minister of Magic, you're capable of anything."

"Do they look ok?" He asked self consciously.

"Very intimidating." James nodded with approval. "Perfect for your face off with Dumbledore and Voldemort."

Lily scowled at him. "Stop talking shop."

"Yes dear." James rolled his eyes. "I like them Harry. Your mother did a good job."

"Thanks Dad." Harry replied. "I might have to invest in some sunglasses for street wear though."

"That can be arranged." James said with a grin just as Mr. and Mrs. Granger and their eldest daughter entered the room.

"Good morning." Harry said nodding to them with a broad smile.

All three Grangers stopped and did a double take at the sight of him. When they at last realized that Lily had obviously completed her contacts for Harry, and that he could indeed see them, they laughed in amazement and came over to congratulate the boy. Harry shook Mr. Granger's hand for the first time, looking him directly in the eyes, and all the man's fears melted away. Harry would take care of his youngest daughter, and they would be happy. Hermione snuck up behind Harry and gave him a quick hug before rushing off to help Lily set the table for breakfast. To Harry, food had never smelt so sweet, the day had never been so vibrant, and he had never been so happy.

Harry looked around again, taking in the surroundings of his parent's house. Lily ushered him into a chair at the kitchen table and began to set the food in the middle. Remus and James licked their lips ravenously and seated themselves side by side opposite Harry. Hermione seated herself next to Harry, and Anna sat next to Hermione, throwing them silly grins. Jonathan sat next to James and kicked Anna's foot under the table, causing her to yelp and scowl at her father, but ultimately leave the two love birds alone. Julia sat next to Jonathan at the end of the table and smiled as she watched Hermione squeeze Harry's hand. Lily sat at the end of the table closest to Harry after she finished setting up the table and grinned at the sight of her husband and Remus.

"Some things never change." She said to Harry under her breath.

"They're like two little kids." Harry remarked with a grin, watching them drooling over the bacon they were now sword fighting with.

"You can imagine how it was when Sirius-" Lily broke off solemnly.

The table fell into a mournful silence, as they remembered the man who should rightfully be seated between James and Remus, laughing and pulling pranks with the rest of them. Harry focused on his hands, desperate not to betray his feelings. Sirius should be here. That was all that played over in Harry's mind, yet somehow he knew he was watching over them, from somewhere far above. Albus Dumbledore would pay for this; he would pay for robbing Harry and his family of so many precious memories, and of such a precious person.

